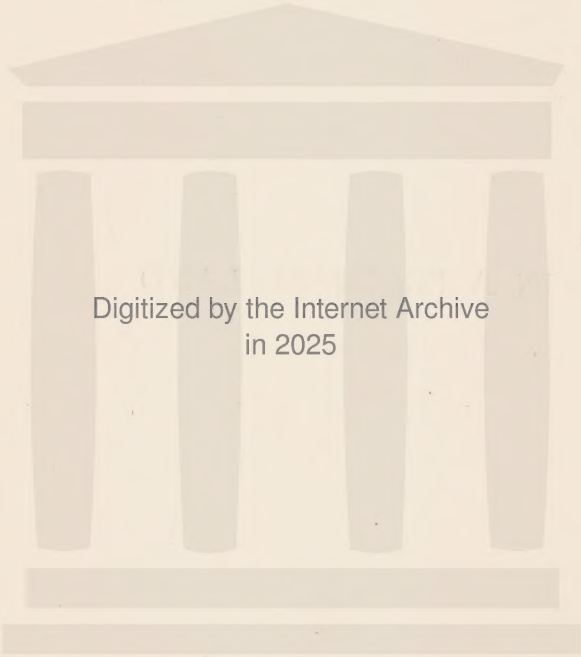
IN A PROMISED LAND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IN
A PROMISED LAND

A Novel

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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IN A PROMISED LAND.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE golden traces of sunset still lingered in the west, yet the winter afternoon was deepening into its brief dark dusk when Jesse Runciman presented himself at the door of Dreyer's canteen, at the appointed hour. He found the canteen-keeper standing, as he might constantly be seen standing, just outside the doorway, leaning against the door-post, smoking. He looked, as usual when unoccupied, faintly bored; but not unpleasantly so; it was merely as

though he were contentedly waiting, with something of the languid certainty of expectation expressed in the lines of a piece of sea-wet weed during ebb-tide, for the hour when the flood should once more claim and revive him. On this occasion his appearance entirely belied his real sentiments; but he was acting under strict orders, which forbade him to show anything of that sense of the exquisite humour of the situation with which he was secretly bubbling over.

When the young minister came to the door, Dreyer took his pipe out of his mouth, and Jesse was conscious that some remark was being addressed to him; but he was, at the moment, as incapable of understanding it as he would have been of originating any. It mattered little, since it was merely intended to give an appearance of ease and naturalness to the meeting; two or three similar ones succeeded, to which Jesse

answered "Yes" or "No" at random, and then Dreyer led the way into the canteen.

When some half-hour later, Runciman came out again, alone, his bearing, his whole expression, had undergone a subtle but very curious change. When he came, he had been very pale, and a certain superficial sullenness had made but the thinnest disguise for the fear that was staring with a sort of fascinated fixity out of his scared eyes. Now, as he stood for an instant beneath the lighted lamp above the doorway, he was pale enough still, but the fear seemed to have been driven out for the moment. He looked almost resolute, but with the resolution of absolute despair. He had gone in with still some possibilities of struggle left in him, if it were only for very fear's sake: he came out mastered beyond daring even to listen to the voice of fear, forbidden so much as to look afraid, lest the substance of

that dread should, by his very looks, be brought upon him.

Even as he turned from the door of the canteen, that of the room which he had just left was opened from without, and Dreyer came in. He had not been allowed to be present at the interview: it said a good deal for Westoby's influence that even his devouring curiosity had not emboldened him to satisfy himself by listening. He had too little hope of being able to affect unconsciousness afterwards with any degree of success. He did not find Westoby particularly communicative, though seemingly not out of humour; to Dreyer's inquiry as to whether it was all right, he replied:

"Right enough, for this time; and the first is sure to be the worst one."

"How did he take it?"

"As you might fancy. Couldn't do this, and would never do that, and didn't dare

the other. I can't be bothered with going through it all again; once a day is about enough of such foolery."

He stood up and stretched himself, as if dismissing a wearisome if unimportant matter. But Dreyer, who was not wanting in persistence, went on:

"Was he in a very great funk?"

"Quite enough," said Westoby, with a short laugh.

Dreyer fumbled a little over the lock of the chiffonier which he was opening; he kept his face hidden from Westoby, and tried to keep all trace of the feeling to which he had just referred out of his voice, but with very partial success.

"Of course, you know best, Baas," he began, conciliatingly; "but I should have thought it was a bit risky, too, to trust a chap that's given to lose his head at awkward times."

Westoby laughed out with one of his most thunderous peals of laughter. He was altogether more visibly excited just now than he often allowed himself to be. It might have been triumph, but the impression it gave was rather that of a certain ferocity which, though carefully subdued, now and again nearly escaped even his strong control. Now he came up to Dreyer with one of his lounging strides, and by a mere twist of the great hand he laid on the canteen-keeper's shoulders, brought him round, so that the lamplight fell upon his face. It was a little pale and discomposed.

"So you've got a touch of it too, then?" he laughed. "There, go on with your job," he continued, releasing him, "and make yourself easy. He'll not dare to lose his head, nor back out, nor give trouble of any sort for one good while. You may bet anything you please he's more afraid of *me*,

by now, than of all the law and the prophets."

Dreyer, looking a little annoyed and confused, muttered something indistinct.

"Now it'll only depend on you to keep it up; you'll find it's a trump card. Don't be always playing it, of course; but don't let him ever quite lose the feel of me, either. Make as big a bogie of me as you like, in reason. You may tell him any yarns you please about me—as much as you think he'll swallow."

"If I was to keep to true ones," retorted Dreyer, "there'd be some pretty stories still, wouldn't there? Not likely to make a man feel much like kicking."

Westoby laughed again.

"Oh! so long as you understand," he said, "I leave that part of the job to you. It's a bit awkward for me to be my own trumpeter."

Dreyer nodded comprehendingly ; he pushed over one of the tumblers of liquor he had been preparing, towards his companion. Westoby tossed it off, standing.

"Thank ye," he said, setting down the glass with a crash, "I wanted something to take away the taste of all that shilly-shallying. You look as if you'd be none the worse of it, either," he added, with a touch of malice. "Only, mind you," he said, with sudden earnestness, bringing down his hand on the table to enforce attention, "what's sauce for the goose ain't always sauce for the gander, whatever folks may say, and you'll remember that in this matter."

"I don't know what you mean," said Dreyer, a little sulkily. "If you've any orders to give, give 'em plain ; I ain't bound to understand riddles."

"I'll give 'em plain enough," retorted Westoby. "Mind, then, you never lend so

much as a finger to making the Reverend Runciman drink."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dreyer, with a touch of genuine surprise. "I hadn't thought of it."

"Maybe not; but take my word for it, you'll be tempted to do it before all's said and done. You may see him that low as to be ready to hang himself—he won't do that, but you might think it. You may see him in as blue a funk as ever even you were in, in your life; never let yourself be tempted to cheer him up or put a little heart into him, as you call it, that way. What's more, don't allow him."

"But if he chooses, how can I prevent him?"

"If you can't, then you must send for me; *I'll* talk to him," said Westoby, grimly. "What are you wondering about?" he went on, and the latent savageness in his mood

seemed to break out all at once; "that I should care so much whether he goes to the devil or no? I don't care—or rather, the sooner the better; but I'll be hanged if he goes there in any way that's likely to make things unpleasant for me. And I tell you, once let him take to *that*, and he'll be neither to have nor to hold."

He spoke with a sternness which showed the importance which he attached to this point. For a moment he remained standing, silent; then he seemed at once to shake off his seriousness, and to repress an uprising of personal vindictiveness which he had betrayed more than he could have wished, in the tone of his last speech. Not in the hours when Jesse Runciman had most thwarted and insulted him, had Westoby hated him with such a fervour of hatred as rose up in him now when the young man was at his mercy. It seemed he had scarcely

known what hatred really meant, till he had begun to taste revenge. He quieted himself, not without a certain effort, and went to the door. There he turned for a moment.

"In two hours from now," he said, "our young gentleman will have settled himself. I would like to hear his discourse to-night, it ought to be what the old ladies call very precious." He was gone, upon the sneer. If he could have had his wish, he might have been at once pleased and disappointed.

When Runciman entered the location that evening, it was with the dream-like abstraction of manner which was the nearest approach he could make to self-control, obtained only by a desperate determination to keep his mind at each successive moment a complete blank, so far as concerned the next. He had no need to think, so far as thought meant planning; his master had supplied him with

every detail he could require, whether of speech or action—had even gone so far as to make him rehearse his part till his tongue no longer tripped, till he no longer halted or fumbled in his movements.

He stood at the door of one of the huts; the dark, variously bedizened figures clustered round, coming and going much as the fancy took them: those whose fancy did not turn that way at all jabbered to each other, sparred or laughed, at a more or less respectful distance. In an open space, not far from where he stood, a fire had been kindled on the ground; squatted round it, three or four naked Kaffirs were engaged in some very primitive cookery. The flame leaped, and wavered, and sank; in the red glare the night sky took on a more velvety depth of blackness, the far stars whitened. Mysterious, uncertain shadows came and went; they played about the preacher's face, alternating

with the fitful glow—had there been any agitation to conceal, this would have concealed it. But there was none: Jesse's face was as inanimate as was his language, which flowed on in conventionally inflected common-places of which he could scarcely have believed himself capable.

It was over at last. The little group began to disperse; only one or two, lingering, came up in turn to exchange a few words with him. Among these was a native in a blanket, with a Kaffir switch in his hand, who had been standing on the outskirts of the audience. Moshetsewa who, at some time during the course of his dealings with civilization, had acquired the suggestive alias of "By-and-Bye," was an ordinary looking Kaffir, in whom, of all the amiable traits of the savage character, a physiognomist might perhaps have decided those of laziness and cunning to be pre-

dominant. But even of this amount of expression there was scarcely enough to make him really distinctive. He was of good average size and strength of build; not one of the blackest of his kind; his face, now enlivened by a sort of deprecatory grin displaying all his strong yellowish animal-looking teeth, was seamed here and there with deeply-furrowed scars, reminiscences of some faction-fight in the Natal location where he had sojourned for a few months, a year or so before.

If Runciman had not known beforehand what was to be the gist of his remarks, perhaps he would scarcely have been able to follow them, as the man spoke in a dialect with which Jesse had but a very slight acquaintance; they could, in fact, just understand each other, and no more. If any of the inmates of the location took the trouble to notice at all when Runciman

followed the man into one of the huts, none thought it remarkable ; he had often done so before, both in cases of sickness and at the request of theological inquirers.

Inside, the hut was quite dark, even when the owner had lighted a small end of candle, that scarcely did more than faintly illuminate a little space of the red earth on which it stood, and the still grinning features of the savage who now squatted beside it. But Jesse knew, by feeling rather than by sight, that they two were alone ; and so far as he dared even think what he felt—he did feel glad of it—glad, too, of the darkness which seemed to hide, even from himself, something of his fear and of his shame. Near the spot where Moshetsewa had set down the candle, a sort of lair, of which the component parts were indistinguishable in the dim light, represented his bed. Amongst, or under, this—Runciman could

scarcely see which—he now began to grub with his strong coarse black fingers : it was the work of a few moments, then he pivoted round on his heels and held out a hollowed hand in whose palm, mixed with the red soil from which he had just unearthed them, lay some score of rough diamonds, varying in size and shape. He brought his hand into the little circle of yellow light, and still sitting upon his heels reached it up towards Runciman, a furtive cunning growing in his eyes, while his features tried to express a modest consciousness of merit, and a confidence that the result of his labours would be properly appreciated.

Jesse bent down to look. Even as he mechanically counted the stones, there came across him the thought of how it might be if, now, at the very last, in the few seconds that remained before the sale was consummated, he should draw back ; how if, braving,

once for all, Westoby's threats and insinuations, he should discharge what once would have seemed such a simple duty ; should send one of the men whom he could trust straight off to the police-station, and deliver the culprit over to justice then and there. He thought of this ; but it was as, one short year ago, he would have thought of his present position, concerning which, then, had warning voice or vision foreshown it to him, how ready would have been his scornful remonstrance : " Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing ? "

As visionary, as impossible, as his present course of action would have seemed to him then, did this idea seem to him now. Westoby's eyes watched him, out of the darkness ; Westoby's sneers and brutal bullyings rang in his ears ; his arm still ached with one wrenching grip which Westoby had fastened on it to enforce

some point of obedience or attention. Westoby had meant that it should. The dream of revolt passed, as it had come, in the few brief moments that he stood bent over that upstretched hand. He stood up again.

"That's not enough stuff for the bargain," he said. "Where's the rest?" In his voice, his manner, was the most piteously ridiculous reminiscence of his master's; he repeated his lesson with the sort of conscientious second-hand appropriateness of inflection of a little child on recitation-day.

The blankest amazement here overspread Moshetsewa's countenance. He protested that, in allowing these stones to change hands for the paltry sum of fifteen pounds, he was taking what not another boy on the Fields would accept; that he had no more; that the Baas might search both his

hut and his person, but never another diamond could he produce.

Now Runciman had not the least idea whether the stones produced were a fair equivalent to the money promised or not. Moshetsewa had guessed this much; and though he knew that not for a moment would Westoby be induced to believe that they were, he cherished a hope, worth trading on under the circumstances, that he might be able to account to him for the deficiency. Perhaps, by dint of hard swearing, it would be possible to persuade his principal that the fault lay with the intermediary: that the gems, handed over by himself in their integrity, had been misappropriated by this scoundrel *en route*. But he had not calculated on Westoby's having made all these mental calculations for him, beforehand, with the greatest exactness, and having instructed his agent

accordingly. Therefore, when Runciman, though he had found the address barely intelligible, still keeping doggedly to his instructions, proceeded to count out before the greedy, glittering eyes about one-third of the sum agreed on, Moshetsewa felt that he had mistaken his man—one or both of them.

He whined out a few more remonstrances; but as these produced no effect whatever, he seemed, with regret, perhaps, but without the slightest shame, to resign himself to the inevitable. Throwing off his blanket, he carefully deposited the stones upon it; then, taking up the switch which he had thrown to one side, he stood up. It was a handsome switch, of long ivory-white horsehair, mounted in a heavy, elaborately-worked brass and copper-wire handle, ending in a sort of crook. Stooping a little forward, he began to shake it, sharply

but carefully, over the blanket. And, as he shook, the thing began to rain diamonds; now glittering a little as the uncut crystal, in falling, chanced to catch the candle-light; more often dropping dark, and no more beautiful than so many tiny pebbles, they fell by ones and twos upon the blanket. The wonder of the thing, perhaps, made the precious shower seem more copious than it really was, for when the contents had been, honestly this time, discharged, only some eight or ten extra stones were lying amongst the others; but even Runciman's inexperience could see something of the difference in size and quality.

Moshetsewa, with an anxious eye on the agent's countenance, was now whisking and shaking his switch in a frenzied manner, by way of proving its entire emptiness.

"No more," he said, quite pathetically; "no more anywhere. It is true."

Then, as if fearing that Runciman might still be incredulous, he suddenly squatted down again close to the candle.

"Not anywhere," he repeated. "See!"

With the words he opened his mouth, as a human mouth is seldom seen to be opened. He snatched up the candle, and allowed the light to penetrate to the most cavernous recesses.

"Feel, if you like, Baas," he said, and opened it again for a moment.

He set the candle down, and began to run his fingers desperately through the mat of his woolly hair; to shake his head wildly, again offering the test of personal inspection. Then suddenly springing to his feet, he began a series of the most extraordinary antics. He danced, he wriggled, he shook himself, he flung out his arms, his legs, his toes, his fingers; he seemed to throw himself to the four winds, to do everything

except actually turn himself inside out. And all the time he wailed, at intervals, with the accent of genuine sincerity—

"No more anywhere. See! It is true."

It was horrible, loathsome, inhuman—this naked savage capering and contorting, without shame, without even a perception of degradation. There came upon Jesse, as he beheld, a disgust, a revolt—and yet that was not all, it was not the worst. The worst was some nameless, hideous stirring of fascination; something in him that wanted to laugh—and he knew that the sound would be that strange Kaffir laugh, which is neither to be mistaken nor described; he felt as if another minute might see himself committed to some unthinkable horror of degradation; as if he might fall to dancing too. In fact, between nervousness and shame, and the imitation born of a sort of

defiant impenitence which had seized him now that the thing was done, he was nearly at the end of his powers of endurance. For the moment even Westoby was forgotten.

"Stop that devil's dancing, will you!" he exclaimed in English, stamping his foot in a passion of nervous irritability, "and let us finish the business."

His words were unintelligible, but his gestures satisfied Moshetsewa that he was convinced. He stopped, therefore, with perfect composure, seeming rather pleased with himself.

Jesse pretty nearly flung the rest of the money at him ; it was not accepted any the less gratefully. Then, taking out of his pocket two or three pieces of lead-foil, he knelt down and began to wrap up the diamonds in them, a dozen or thereabouts in each, re-counting them hastily as he did so, and waving off Moshetsewa, when that

gentleman insinuatingly offered his assistance. Westoby had been strong on this point: he knew Moshetsewa's gifts of legerdemain too well to let him lay a finger on the stones again, once they were out of his possession.

Runciman stood up, put the three little parcels into some of his inner pockets, and went out. The last he saw of Moshetsewa was a grin.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RUNCIMAN went out, and for quite a space of time his feeling was one of pure unmitigated relief. He was so thankful to have done with the sordid, sickening, material rascality of this first part of the business, that he quite forgot to feel afraid.

Then, just as he got into the township, some wretched stray cur, sneaking up, began to snuff and jump upon him with little yelping barks; one or two passers-by turned to look. It was enough. In an instant, for Jesse, the darkness—the saving sheltering darkness—was shattered into light: a light that laid bare his soul—not to him-

self, oh! that would have mattered so little —but to all the world. Everyone knew what he had been doing, what he bore about him. They were all looking at him, now; when they spoke to one another it was of him. In a moment some man would cry to his neighbour, and the chase would begin. He must run; he must. Ah! no; he must not; this was folly, he was going mad. Of course, they did not know; and, no, he must not run. What had Westoby said? he had warned him of just this trial; with what penalties of instant detection had he not threatened him as the sure consequence of a moment's loss of nerve, of the most rigid control of action, even of expression? And then deep called unto deep of fear as he recalled, in every awful detail, the merciless picture that had been drawn for him of all that detection would mean.

He pulled himself together, and with such an effort as he had scarcely made in his life, actually did master every outward sign of trepidation, except, perhaps, a deadly paleness. Even, with the soul of every sense absorbed in fear, blind, and deaf, and dazed with fear, he contrived to keep a sort of external watchfulness on what was going on around him, lest, haply, some word, some incident, should find him unprepared.

Nothing did happen, however, which perhaps was just as well. He reached home after an interval which mocked all measurement by time; went straight to his little study, locked himself in, and then sank down on a chair, covered his face with his hands, and was seized at once with a fit of shivering in which the intolerable nervous tension of the last few hours seemed to relax at last. For some minutes he could neither move nor think;

only sit there, shaken with this silent uncontrollable convulsion. Then by degrees, nature, having avenged, righted herself; he drew one deep breath, raised his head, and began to gather strength. He stood up, unlocked the drawer in which he kept his little japanned cash-box, unlocked that too, and put in the parcels of diamonds.

Then he hesitated. Westoby had bidden him put it back in the drawer, asking, with contemptuous impatience, why there should be more danger this night than on any other. But he had not the nerve for this. The drawer, indeed, he shut and locked as usual; the box he could not bring himself to trust out of his sight. He carried it with him into the room which he had occupied since Mattie's illness; there he put it on a chair close to the bed, where he had but to stretch out his hand to feel it safe.

He had prepared himself for a sleepless night; but, perhaps, that would have been less trying than the succession of dreams from which he woke every time in an agony of terror, yet of which he never could quite remember the catastrophe. Between whiles he lay in that sort of helpless half-wakefulness, which allows of thought but not of any control over it; in this state he revolved, over and over again in a weary round, every plan he had ever heard of for the concealment of illicitly purchased diamonds. Over and over, till his brain was weary almost to delirium, he would see himself unscrewing the brass knobs from the head and foot of the bedstead in his own room, filling them with those dreadful little parcels, and then screwing them on again; and in his imagination they never would screw back quite tight—would topple over suspiciously to one side; he saw himself

twisting and twisting till his head seemed to turn with the screws. Or else, endlessly, hopelessly, he would be boring out a hollow in the foot of a table—a hollow, which somehow silted up again as fast as he scooped it out; if he had accomplished it, and the hateful property had been thrust away into it, then the cork which was to close the opening would not fit; it was too large, and the table would not stand steady, or it was too small, and down slipped the diamonds again and again. Then, when he seemed on the verge of madness with this helpless waking nightmare, his brain would cloud over imperceptibly and he would doze off again, only to dream and wake as before.

However, towards morning he did fall into a heavy dreamless sleep; it refreshed him sufficiently to enable him to present a tolerable appearance when he got up. That is to say, he did not look perceptibly worse

than he had done for the last ten days. It is true that his looks, since the terrible day of the bazaar, had earned for him the pity, and for Mattie, rather unjustly, the indignation, of all their Beaconsfield acquaintance. Before leaving his room, he put the stones once more in his pockets; the box he restored, unnoticed, to its place. Towards the middle of the forenoon he went out.

He walked along the road towards the cemetery for a short half-mile, then turned aside where a sort of cart-track wound in and out among a clump of débris heaps. The track led to a few hovels at the back of the heaps; a wretched group of half-ruinous unbaked brick tenements and patched-up tin shanties, where an ever-shifting population of tramps, and the lowest class of coloured folk, received indifferently the attentions of any minister who chose to look them up, and were gone before next visit. It was a sort

of No-man's-Land. Jesse had been there, on and off, like others; but this morning, though he seemed to be making for this, he did not go so far. A little way beyond the main road, he left the track, and made his way among the intricacies of the heaps. Presently he came to a spot where an old washing-machine seemed to have been abandoned on one of the slopes. Here he sat down and waited.

He sat in a perfect solitude. Above him, and all around him, the débris heaps rose—a confused tumble of formless mounds, like so many fossilized, livid-grey sandhills, rent, in places, into deep fissures, as if by the shock of an earthquake. Here and there, the slender saplings of the tobacco tree, with its sparsely-set, glaucous-green foliage, were already springing up from the caked dry ground. There was no other verdure. When Jesse looked up, he could see, above

the heaps, high up against the sunny sky, the skeleton lines of an aerial tramway at the Bullfontein mine, with the trucks gliding up and down. The mounds made a shelter from the wind, which was clear and cruelly cold; there was a pleasant glow of sunshine over all the bare grey slopes: it was very warm and still; only now and then the rumble of an unseen waggon, or the sharper rattle of a cart, came from the main road; now and then a strident whistle from some engine at the mine. Jesse sat and waited.

Presently, from an opposite direction to that by which he himself had come, he saw Christian Dreyer advancing towards him. In another minute he had come up and seated himself beside the young minister. The situation could not fail to be a little awkward, and Dreyer showed more tact than might have been expected in not pro-

longing it. After a sufficiently civil greeting, and a general remark on the weather, he said :

"If you have brought the things, Mr. Runciman, we'll just do the job at once, if you don't mind. I'm in a bit of a hurry."

He went over to where the old washing-machine lay, rusty, rotten, and superannuated, and from some recess within or beneath it, drew out a pair of diamond scales. Jesse surrendered his parcels. Dreyer unwrapped them carefully, examining the contents with the swift eye of a connoisseur.

"A few real good things," he said; "the rest nothing special. Up to average sample, but not much more. After all the Baas said about that chap, I should have thought he might have done more for us ; however, it's not so bad. There are just a few out of the way good."

He proceeded with his weighing in silence, doing the delicate work with the

careful quickness of long practice. Not another word was exchanged till the stones, wrapped up as before, had been restored to Jesse's pocket, and the scales to the machine. Then Dreyer, sitting down again, made a rapid calculation in pencil on the back of a dirty envelope.

"It was to be so much per carat, wasn't it?" he asked, looking up for a moment. "The Baas didn't say anything to me about any agreement having been made about quality."

"No; there was none."

Dreyer nodded, resumed his calculations for a moment, and then, taking out a greasy purse, handed over the sum due on commission. For an instant the colour rushed furiously into the young man's pale face; then, with a rather too aggressive assumption of indifference, he put the notes into his pocket-book, in the silence which was all the

approach to dignity that the situation permitted him. If Dreyer eyed him rather curiously, rather humorously, he did not make any offensive parade of doing so.

"We used to do a good bit of business here, at one time," he said, perhaps to cover the pause during Jesse's proceedings, "but now the boys are afraid of it. The chap that thing belonged to," he went on, pointing to the machine, "was in the trade, and one day he was trapped. He got away, but next day they found him again just by the border; he took to the river, but he wasn't much of a swimmer and he was drowned. Now the niggers say he left a lot of stuff buried somewhere about here, and comes back to look for it. They swear they have seen him digging in broad daylight, and they won't come here any more. But I've never seen anything."

Runciman paid little conscious attention

to this anecdote, though it was to have its own power for torment later on, too. He sat sullenly passive, while Dreyer, now getting interested in his subject, rambled on :

"I never did hold much with that burying dodge, myself," he said, reflectively. "If it's safe in one way, it's risky in another ; if anything happens, it's a hundred to one you never see your stuff again, nor the value of it. Some other chap'll have tumbled on it, or they'll have built over it, or something ; maybe you'll never be able to hit on just the place again yourself—the lie of the land changes a deal here, even in five years."

Jesse's nerves had steadied wonderfully, under the influence of Dreyer's presence and cheerfully business-like manner. But when the speaker paused on this allusion, with a half-melancholy shake of the head, it was too much for him. He shivered involuntarily ; a sick feeling came over

him. Dreyer did not observe the change in his face.

"No, I don't hold with it," he went on, with decision. "'Small profits and quick returns,' as the shops say—that was always my motto. The Baas, now, he takes a fancy at times for doing things on a real big scale; he likes the risk of it, I fancy—seems to amuse him. But I don't care about it myself; though, no doubt, it pays better, too."

It was all too degrading, too horrible; this disgust was almost worse than the fear

With a sudden movement, the young man rose to his feet. Dreyer misunderstood the feeling that had prompted him.

"Yes, you had better be the first to go," he said, rising also. "You quite understand all the rest, don't you? You'll soon get used to the business," he went on, encouragingly. "You feel a bit sick and

funky at first — we all do, bless you! I was just as bad when I started, but it soon goes off. Before long, you'll think no more of it than you would of buying a ticky loaf."

It was really kindly meant. Dreyer had no personal grudge against the young man, and the real spirit of the situation he was honestly incapable of understanding; for his moral perceptions were of the dullest, and of spiritual sense he had not a trace. Therefore, it was out of a real impulse of kindliness, moved by the neophyte's pallor and evident agitation, that he sought to speak words of cheer; it was with the same laudable motive that, forgetting for a moment Westoby's injunctions to avoid all unusual familiarity of manner, he put out his hand, and grasped Runciman's with a clasp that was half patronage, half good-fellowship — Runciman, to whom he had

never yet offered any but the most obtrusively respectful of salutations!

Jesse startled as if he had been stung; his fingers, his whole person seemed to stiffen; the hand that Dreyer released might have been lifeless, so unresponsively it fell. Drawing up his head with something of the old haughtiness, of which he had not yet fully grasped the terrible absurdity, he turned on his heel, and went off without a word. He was still so new to it all; he could not so suddenly recognize his true position. How did that fellow dare! Ah, how, indeed? And how could Jesse, as yet, suspect that the days should come when even such sympathy as this would be not ungrateful to him in the awful moral isolation to which he had unknowingly committed himself?

He went home, and finished his preparations as directed. Early in the after-

noon, he walked into Kimberley with a parcel, which he took to a transport agency —not Westoby's—one of whose waggons was advertised to start next morning. It was addressed to the minister in charge of a mission-station some ten miles from Christiana, to be left till called for at a certain store in that village; and it was described as containing books, and did, indeed, contain books—and other things; for the pierced and riddled pages of the half-dozen Kaffir Testaments were so many little cases for rough diamonds.

It was not a pleasant moment, that in which he surrendered his parcel; nor did he carry it off very well. But the office was full, the clerks were busy, and nobody paid him much attention—just enough to see to his business, certainly not enough to notice his manner. And, in words, he did not dare show any particular anxiety about the

matter. When the man who received the parcel banged it down behind the counter among the rest of the goods, Jesse's heart seemed to stand still for a moment, such an awful expectation came over him of seeing the contents scattered on every side in the sight of all beholders. But, of course, nothing happened, and somehow he got himself out of the office.

However, the walk back quieted him considerably ; it was something, it was much, to feel personally free from that horrible intimate risk which he had actually carried about with him for so long. A reaction of comparative security set in—a reaction so strong as to be almost gladness. He slept that night with the sleep of such relief that it might have been the slumber of innocence —so deep it was, and so refreshing.

With the next day he entered upon a period of suspense ; how long this lasted he

scarcely knew, because, beginning with a mere fidgetiness, it grew by degrees, till, stretched on the rack of his anxiety, time seemed to lengthen out into eternity. Day and night, as the days went on and brought him no news, his imagination tortured him. The catastrophe which overtook Eugene Aram in his attempts to conceal the body of his victim, were probable and natural, compared with those which Jesse foresaw for his parcel; and in whatever form vengeance visited the transport for its sake, that alone survived the wreck of all things, and in such a way as to get itself traced back—surely, unerringly, inevitably, to him as the sender.

He could not have held out much longer, he must have humbled himself to seek encouragement even of Dreyer, when, one morning, an unknown but civilized-looking Kaffir came up to him in the street, and,

pulling his shapeless felt hat, said in English, "If you please, Baas, the big Baas tell me to tell you it is all right."

The relief, the final, unutterable relief, was so intense, so awful, even, that the young minister, dropping with a gesture of the rapture of enfranchisement the hand he had passed across his eyes and brow, had uttered a "Thank God!" as instinctive as it was passionate, before he realized what he was saying. The next instant it had flashed across him: What was this thing for which he was returning thanks? What an awful mockery, what a blasphemy was here! A great dread came upon him, of a kind of which, till this moment, he had felt no trace. He could not go further that morning; he turned and went home, conscious, for the first time, not only of criminality, but of sin.

The stern and irrefutable logic of facts has convinced the most obtuse I. D. B.

that his proceedings are illegal; it would require the most persuasive efforts of a master of casuistry in the cause of virtue to persuade even an averagely intelligent one that they are also immoral. Probably it could not be done at any price. To get a fair conception of the general state of feeling as regards this matter, from a moral point of view, one may look back to the early years of the present century—the good old times of the English smuggling trade; the parallel will be found in many points singularly complete.

But Jesse had not been brought up to average ideas either of law or honesty, nor did his temperament allow of his taking an average line in any such matter. He suffered in proportion. Hitherto sheer unmitigated dread of the legal consequences of his action had left no room for any other feeling, much less for reflection. Now that

this dread was temporarily removed, he had time to realize his moral position. It was a long time since he had done this. A general idea that matters were not particularly satisfactory, he had had; but the details in themselves were so trifling that it was easy to refuse to look at them at all.

But this was no longer the day of small things. He could scarcely shut his eyes to the fact that he had been within an inch of murder, and was now, to all intents and purposes, a thief. He did not trouble himself to adjust the exact balance of criminality between the purchaser of stolen property and the actual abstractor. Sophistry of this kind was not one of his failings; he might refuse to look matters in the face at all, but if either conscience or circumstances forced him to do so, he was under less temptation than most men to call things by other than their right names. He

cut clear in all his judgments—of himself no less than of others. It was one of the few moral compensations of his temperament.

This, then, was how he stood: with these secrets on his soul he must go about, day by day, persuading, rebuking, exhorting—perhaps for the very things in which he had so glaringly failed himself; must stand up to discourse of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come—and it was certain that none of his hearers would tremble as the preacher would himself; for though he was not really at all penitent, as yet, he was now horribly frightened.

He would have done anything—anything in the world—to get out of his false position; except the only thing that could avail—honest confession to the authorities at Cape Town. This he could not do.

Even if he had reached the point at which confession would have been to himself a relief almost exquisite in its intensity (and he was far from this as yet), he still could scarcely have brought himself to it.

The consequences! Supposing, even, that to avoid open scandal he were not actually degraded from the ministry, of course he would be removed; there were places which, though not ostensibly so, were yet, as the initiated knew, practically penal settlements—places where old-established elders and deacons made, by a sort of tacit understanding with the authorities, the life of an erring or suspected minister a burden to him—places always liable to surprise visits from head-quarters, which had to be carried off as an honour instead of an inquisition. And if the minister fared ill, what of the minister's wife? How would

Mattie suit herself to such a remove as that?

But probably he would be degraded. They would be so angry with themselves for having been so egregiously deceived in him. what mercy had he to expect at their hands? He would be degraded; would disappear; would be, as it were, blotted out; sent up in disgrace, open and undisguised, to some remote settlement—set, perhaps, to actual manual labour. And Mattie must go with him. What slow lonely misery of estrangement did this imply! what wearing bitterness of daily, hourly upbraiding! Would she not make it even a reproach to him that he had not killed her outright, rather than drag her, living, to this obscure dishonoured death-in-life?

No; he must go through with it at all costs, smothering his spiritual terrors as best he could, as he had smothered the others of

the last few days. They would wear off in time, perhaps; he knew that to hope this was to hope for the consummation of all terror, yet he did look to it as to a little respite from suffering on this side eternity. Why should he suffer in two lives? from the fear as well as from its fulfilment? since the one could not save him from the other.

And while he was in this frame of mind, Mattie got a letter from Sarah Arkwright. A few lines announcing the death of old Mr. Glasse—Sarah had not, after all, been in time to see him again alive—had reached them a day or two before the bazaar. This letter was to say nothing less than that they were leaving Beulah in a few weeks' time, and coming to settle in Kimberley. Mr. Glasse's death had changed many things, Sarah said; Sam had set his heart on this move, and it seemed better in many ways. Except a few tender expressions of pleasure

at the thought of being so much nearer to Mattie, that was all the comment or explanation she gave.

It seemed to Jesse that this was the finishing touch. He dreaded her arrival with dread unspeakable. If, in the days of his comparative innocence, her presence had been a rebuke to him, how should he bear it now? how endure, without some fatal self-betrayal, the bitter mockery of her spiritual hero-worship, which could never do more for him, now, than show the height from which he had fallen? For he had stood on that height once; surely her estimate of him had once, at least, been justified by facts. He could not part with that last shred of self-complacency—not yet. But, oh! if wishes, passionate almost to prayer, could have kept her away!

And yet at times, as from infinite distance beyond the region of the possible, there

came to him a thought that, if one could only afford to be sorry, here was a heart into whose pure pity, into whose infinite motherliness, penitence might be poured, not indeed without shame, yet without the worst of bitterness ; might sob itself out at her knee, from a soul humbled indeed utterly, yet which she would not suffer to feel itself humiliated beyond hope of resurrection.

What did it all matter ? seeing that he at least could not afford to be sorry. Because for him the first condition of repentance must be confession, and confession must mean punishment, and that—take what form it would, must so far involve Mattie as to make the breach between them hopeless, complete, impassable. He hardened himself, therefore, to the best of his ability, succeeded sometimes, sometimes failed, and in either case was miserable.

CHAPTER XXVII.

In the brief warm sunshine of a July afternoon, the most unfairly used and deeply injured man in South Africa stood leaning, with crossed arms, upon the balcony of the Kimberley Club. Gerald Blake had not the shadow of a doubt as to the justice of the above description. No words of which he had the command could adequately express his opinion of the world in general, so far as concerned its relations to himself. Presently he withdrew his gaze from the recesses of the gum-trees, to which it had apparently been directed, and turned it upon a mail letter which he took out of his pocket.

There was nothing more to be extracted from it this time of reading, than there had been from the numerous perusals with which he had honoured it before—why he should have been so persistent in harrowing up his soul with its most uncomfortable contents it would not be easy to say. Perhaps just because they did harrow up his soul, and he found a melancholy satisfaction in the process. If he had no one else to be sorry for him, he would, at least, savour to the utmost every pang of the exquisite pity he was feeling for himself.

He read it through once more, therefore, then replaced it with the air of one for whom life can hold no more possibilities of pained surprise. He raised his eyes again, and began to look idly up and down the length of Dutoitspan Road, but he saw nothing of what there might have been to see—strangely enough, his whole mental vision

was occupied with the form of a woman, and that woman Sophy de Jongh.

And he saw her mercilessly. She had, naturally, never been attractive; now that she had become a necessity she appeared nothing else than repulsive. He saw her in detail: from the sort of shallow elliptical curve in which her neatly parted hair lay flatly on each side of her gentle brow—a brow which, in itself, was somehow so suggestive of the larger domestic ruminants—down to the sturdy feet which went with a certain honest ponderous reflectiveness which seemed to say that though motion was not agreeable to the owner, she would yet go far if you gave her time. Somehow he could never see an ox-waggon without thinking of Sophy.

And to this he must tie himself for life; his days of liberty, even his hours, were numbered. That letter from home had been

his last hope, and the letter had destroyed it. The matter admitted no longer of delay. The next forty-eight hours must see his prospects sufficiently established to form, at least, a security for renewed borrowing, or he must be irretrievably disgraced. Besides his tradesmen creditors, who were becoming objectionably clamorous, he had gambling debts, whose discharge within that limited period had become imperative. This very morning, a man to whom he had lost heavily had approached the subject in a tone which was civil merely in form, and had left Gerald more nearly desperate than he had ever been in his life.

He lingered there, on the balcony, sulking with, rather than fighting against, Fate; subsiding gradually from the protest of upbraiding to the protest of plaintiveness, and so to a kind of silent resignation. Of moral compunction he felt none. It is not certain

that he did not think—without definitely putting the thought into form—that he was going to confer a favour on Miss de Jongh at his own expense.

By the time he had brought his resolution to the point of starting on his wooing, he had little feeling left except a desire to get it over—a wish that Sophy could, even for a passing hour, be made reasonably attractive, that so the strain on his dramatic faculties might be a little less.

He, once so constant a visitor, had not called on Miss de Jongh for six weeks past, not since the day of the bazaar. Probably he did not realize how long the interval had been. He knew that he had left her, then, in a certain amount of pique; he made little of that—a touch of jealousy in her, a suggestion of aloofness in him, these might be rather to his advantage.

When he came in sight of the once

so familiar house, he distinguished a red-gowned figure upon the stoep. Sophy was painfully fond of red, of a peculiarly exasperating shade, something between cherry-colour and cardinal, and her gowns always looked as if they had been bought out of batches: there was a singular indistinctness about the cut and fit of them.

She turned at the sound of the opening gate; a dim expression of pain gathered in her patient eyes, when she saw her visitor. It seemed, for a moment, as if she would have retreated into the house; the movement was checked on the instant, yet Blake had seen the slight embarrassment, and welcomed it as an augury of success.

But when, to such introductory general remarks as he felt constrained to make, she answered in monosyllables, he began to wish most devoutly that she would give him a lead. She had done so before often enough,

when he had not cared about it ; some opening, in the expression of her Arcadian, or perhaps Bœotian, simplicity such as would now have given him an excuse for being carried away into forgetting the restraint which an honourable pride had urged him to keep upon his feelings. But how can one be carried away by monosyllables ? and how, on the other hand, could he, without encouragement, make a proposal so obviously audacious—for, of course, she knew his exact position : it was no secret anywhere.

He was at the end of all his small talk—it may be imagined that he had not come out well supplied with that article, under the circumstances ; from necessity, rather than from will, he at last ceased to speak. The silence that ensued was a thing to feel. It was sheer desperation that at last inspired Gerald with the idea of turning that to account ; if it had lasted a moment longer

he must have practically fled, and that he dared not do.

"You—you must be thinking me wretchedly dull company this afternoon," he began, laughing nervously; "but there are times, you see—times when—when, in fact, a fellow can't—— One has feelings, you see, and one can't always be doing the Spartan boy, and all that sort of thing, you know."

And then it occurred to him that she probably would not understand the allusion to that classical youth, and the idea seemed funny—he could not imagine why—and he laughed again, more nervously than before. That horrible silence was coming on once more; he went on, running from it as one tries to run in a nightmare.

"I—I came to say good-bye." (She drew one more sudden breath; it was the breath of relief.) "You know why it is the only course—in fact, why I am bound—why,

I can't, mustn't—why, I daren't come here any more; because—because in days when —when hope would not have been so—so presumptuous—I mean, of course, it would always have been presumptuous, but—but——"

Sophy stood motionless; she had not asked her visitor to be seated, nor had she seated herself. Her eyes were fixed pertinaciously on a geranium in a tin, which she had been watering when he arrived; her hands, loosely locked together, hung straight before her. There was not a trace of nervousness in her any more; nothing but a sort of passive resistance, which seemed to defy heaven and earth to move her either to speech or motion. Blake began to feel puzzled.

"In those days you must have seen something of my feelings for you," he went on, with a comparative fluency born

of increasing desperation. "Now that circumstances have changed, while these still remain the same, it is hard—too hard, for me to go on as—as we were before. Sophy!" he broke out suddenly, "I ought never, I meant never to have said this; but when I saw you—when I fancied—in fact, oh! forgive me, it seemed as if in your silence a—a revelation—— I suppose it was a delusion—some impossible happiness—— But there are times when silence seems—seems to say so much, don't you know, and it was too sudden for me!"

With a very creditable impulsiveness, all things considered, he made a movement to seize one of her hands. For a moment the locked fingers entwined a little more tightly; but when he put a sort of gentle force into his clasp, she yielded to it—an inert, emotionless yielding as of something not worth dispute. She neither stirred nor raised her eyes.

"Oh! Sophy," he continued; "you have hurried me out of what the world would consider my honour. I have gone too far now to retract, and—and, if I have read your heart aright, I think you will be merciful. Sophy, I have nothing to offer you except—except——" (no; somehow he could not say it, but the break in his voice might pass muster for emotion), "and in yourself you are so—so much to me that all the rest seems of no account if you will only let me call you mine!"

"No, thank you, Mr. Blake."

Her voice was toneless; she scarcely looked at him. For a moment he thought he had not heard aright.

"Sophy!"

"No; please you must not call me Sophy. And you must not hold my hand like that. No. And I thank you very much for the honour you have done me"

(she meant no sarcasm; she thought this was the proper form under all similar circumstances); "but no, thank you, I do not want to marry you. No."

There was a sort of dull finality in the very sound of this recurrent monosyllable; the whole being of the woman, her whole enormous power of negative volition, seemed to have concentrated itself in this one word. Blake realized it at last, and a great rage blazed up within him.

"Then what, in Heaven's name, have you meant——" were the words that trembled on his tongue; he actually had to press his lips tight to keep them in, to put physical force upon himself lest he should say something for which his conscience would never forgive him—his conscience as a gentleman, a curious social phenomenon, which survived the wreck that vanity, and sloth, and selfishness had

long since made of his moral one. He released her hand; she stood now as before. It was as if an automaton had been wound up to speech, and, the set form accomplished, had relapsed into the dumbness and inertia natural to it.

"Then," he said, mastering his voice with an effort, "then I have only to apologize for having allowed my imagination so far to mislead me, as to—to annoy you with—with——I will say good afternoon, Miss de Jongh," he ended, desperately.

She returned his bow with a mechanical movement of her head; the garden gate had scarcely closed behind him, when she went through the window into the house, with something of the dragging furtive action with which an animal crawls away to seek a solitude for death.

For some time, Gerald Blake walked on, with no perception of where he was

going. When he realized his whereabouts, he found himself in the neighbourhood of the Public Gardens. Mechanically he passed in through the white gates at the bottom of the long straight walk, till he came upon one of the few rough and often removed benches which border the rather dreary road. He sat down—sat with his head dropped upon his hands, stunned. He knew now that he had never known a doubt, that he had held this way of escape from all his embarrassments to be absolutely secure; and he had a right to think so—with a fresh access of fury he told himself this again and again.

What was he to do now? He had formed no plan, however vague, as an alternative in case of failure, for he had never contemplated the possibility of failure. Yet he must do something, something; and at once; yes, if he had only time to turn

round, he could make combinations, devise means—there must be some. But even time Fate had denied him. It would seem she would deny him the power of thought. That foolish alliterative catchword! he did not want to dwell upon it. "Death rather than dishonour?" well! of course; yet anything short of dishonour (as he understood that), rather than death. But what? what? His thoughts seemed to swing round and round, and on no side to grasp anything. He raised his head, passed his hand across his eyes as though to clear his ideas by main force; and thus looking up, he caught sight of Mr. Solomon's house, facing him between the trees.

Shadowy almost to nonentity, was that hope of salvation; the difficulties in the way of apprehending it insuperable by any courage or ingenuity less than those inspired by despair. At the first shock of

the thought, Blake's sense of the possible reeled back from it as much as did his inclination. Then he forced his mind to familiarize itself with the idea. The thing was possible, for the woman was ambitious; he thought she would hold position to be cheaply purchased by a little sacrifice of pique. However, whether or no, it had to be tried; it was either that or one's revolver.

He stood up, yet a nameless something fettered his very limbs, making every step go heavily. It was nothing else than real fear; he had always been secretly afraid of Dora, the circumstances under which he approached her now were not likely to prove reassuring. He was so far gone in despair, that he actually confessed to himself that he was afraid, without his vanity giving so much as a writhe; he soothed himself as one might soothe an

outsider: "foolish; what was there to be afraid of? after all, she could only say 'no.'" And if she did that? Well, then—— But that was a question beside the point just now; he could not afford any mental digressions.

Miss Solomon was at home and alone. When her visitor came in, her eyes darted irrepressible triumph for one infinitesimal fraction of time; she received him graciously, offered him tea, which he declined. As he did not, could not, at once force even mere voice (he had not left the Gardens till he had the words of his task by heart), she began to talk herself, and talked with an ease and fluency which he had not known to be in her.

"Perhaps you were wanting to see my father?" she suggested, sweetly, at last, when she saw that he had recovered himself up to

vocal point. "I expect him in almost at once, if you can wait."

"Thank you, Miss Solomon," said Gerald, desperately embracing the opening; "but whether I may have the—the privilege of seeking an interview with Mr. Solomon depends upon you."

"Really?" said Dora, as sweetly as before.

But she did not wish to disconcert him by too great an affectation of lack of comprehension, and it was not conspicuous in her tone.

"Yes; I come to put my fate in your hands. This is a bold step, you will think; but you would give me no opportunity of expressing the admiration I have felt for—for months—for your gifts of mind and—and person."

He watched her with a sort of fascination, feeling unable to change one word of

his preconceived address, however she might take it. She bowed slightly; she did not seem displeased.

"So I had to make one. I have often felt—felt quite sorry, you know, that one so fitted to shine in any society should be thrown away in a place like Kimberley; it has its good points, of course, but you must feel, as I do——" he gave a feeble smile, which she graciously gave back to him.

"You know something of the state of my affairs, Miss Solomon," he continued. "In view of those embarrassments, I felt a natural hesitation in begging you to—to—in fact, to give me the right to procure for you that position which is so evidently meant for you. But if you could bring yourself to overlook them—and—and a genius like yours would soon disperse them; if you could—if you only could! Oh! Miss Solomon, could you?"

She raised her eyes and looked him very straight in the face; her expression was enigmatical.

"You want me to marry you?" she said, with sufficient directness.

"That—that was what I had ventured to hope," murmured Gerald, not ungrateful for the plainness, yet slightly taken aback.

She made a sign of comprehension; after a moment she rose from her seat and took a pace or two as if considering. He watched her anxiously. She spoke—and an almost physical shock ran through him. So might the doomed guest have felt when to the banqueting-hall they brought in the black bull's head.

"That is to say," she said, "that as Miss de Jongh proves insensible to the privilege of paying your debts, you graciously condescend to give me the refusal?"

Blake started to his feet.

"If—if you can think that, Miss Solomon——" he stammered; and was choked with blank bewilderment, and rage, and shame.

"I am not talking in 'ifs,'" she said, contemptuously. "I talk of what I know. You said truly enough that I know something of your difficulties; do you suppose I can't guess what would be your first way out of them? For the rest—I myself have told her some plain truths; I told them to her on the day of the bazaar. They were not pleasant truths, and she will never speak to me again for having told them; yet I knew she would act upon them if she had the time to let them work into her. And you have given her time."

No amount of self-restraint could quite suppress one brief sound of entire confounding.

"She has acted upon them, and she was

wise. I did not tell them because I cared for her; yet to any girl I cared for, if I thought she had any heart to break, I would have given the same advice. The woman that marries *you*, had best not be a woman that loves you."

She paused: she watched him, and her soul seemed to itself to dilate with a triumph that was half torture by virtue of its very fury. She spoke no more till, with a sudden choked word, and a gesture—a fierce parody of still instinctive courtesy—he began to move towards the door. Then she simply placed herself in front of it, barring all exit, except by violence. He stopped short. She waved her hand, with a gesture worthy of the dramatic power found so often in the women of her race.

"Wait a little," she said, "you can afford to. *I* have waited a long time." She seemed, in one long breath, to exhale in this

moment the weariness of all those months of waiting. "Yes; you thought I was only a Jewess, the daughter of a Jew broker—what do I say? a broker. He was a bar-man not so very long ago; I am not too old to remember the days of the canteen. Why should I deny it? All Kimberley knows it well enough. And you thought that a woman like that would jump at such a chance as you had to offer. To be made a lady of! Good Heavens! by what a *gentleman!*" She swept him from head to foot in a glance of burning comment. "Oh! if I had ever been foolish enough to wish to be a lady, I should be glad now that my wish wasn't granted; I would renounce it, to-day, for ever—if I even had had it—out of sheer gratitude; because, if I had been a lady, I could not have spoken my mind now."

Her hearer's mind was not sufficiently disengaged to allow him to perceive the

distinct flavour of sour grapes in this speech ; otherwise it might have been a little consolation. For, indeed, Dora was sacrificing her ambition to her revenge—a thing it is not given to a small hatred to accomplish.

"Yes," she repeated; "he asks me to marry him. Listen." She spoke now without any mark of violent excitement ; an occasional long-drawn breath the only interruption to her measured tones. Only her eyes flashed wide slow sheet-lightnings, and her hands, which hung straight down by her sides, opened and shut continually, like the jaws of a trap. "Listen. If I had not more compassion for myself than I have even hatred of you, I would take you at your word. Yes ; I *would* marry you—gentleman loafer though you are, eaten up with laziness, and softness, and selfishness, and conceit. I would marry you, I say, and

avenge on you the wrong done to manhood by such a creature calling itself a man. For you are a coward at bottom." The glance she gave him here deprived him of so much back-bone as he still had left. "I could make all your life one long fear. I would rule you with a rod of iron. In three months' time you should not dare to call your soul your own. Oh! my gentleman," she went on, with a touch of quicker, fiercer scorn, "that aren't too fine to owe your bread to a woman, I would soon let you know the taste of the bread that you would owe to *me*. If anything could make *you* feel as if you would have done better to choose starvation, that should have come near to do it. It is not worth it; revenge itself isn't worth the weariness, the self-disgust of being bound to *you*."

Perhaps it struck her that she had made this picture of a future he had, after all,

escaped, so unattractive as to be rather stimulating to gratitude and relief than to more painful emotions. At any rate she changed her tone.

"And it would not be revenge enough. Given the means of getting fashionable clothes, and a good dinner every day, *you* would manage to find life tolerable after all. But now you won't have them long. And then? Have you ever watched a man going down? *I* have—one sees plenty of it out here. For a time one sees him in the old places, only getting just a little shabbier, more sneaking, so to say, every week. Then, by-and-bye he disappears. He has gone under. Do you know where the people go to that disappear? They don't die; oh! no, not at once. It takes some time before one reads: 'The body of a white man, unknown, was found on the veld near—such and such a place—yesterday morning;' with

the 'death due to exposure' verdict, as usual. There's a great deal of very rough odd-jobbing, and starvation, and degradation, that may be felt even through the drink one takes to drown it, before one comes to that."

Then as if the very ferocity of her description had brought passion to exploding point in her own breast, she stepped to the door, and, as it were, tore it open. With the other hand she pointed, as to some unseen gulf without.

"Go!" she cried, in a voice worthy of her gesture, "go——to all that!" The words might be ineffective, inadequate for a climax, in themselves; the tone, the manner, rendered them nothing less than tremendous.

Gerald Blake lifted to her a face which, long days after, she would have been glad to forget. Now it only added satisfaction to her scarcely yet satiated revenge. So at

least she thought; but in the confusion of her excitement, it is fair to say that her feelings were not very clear to her own self. The look lasted but a second; the next moment, with head bent as it had been all the while, he had gone, in a heavy silence.

She was alone, and it was all over—the dream of an ambition, and the accomplishment of a vengeance dreamed of well-nigh as long, and in as fond a fulness of detail. Almost any woman feeling as she did then would have indulged her over-wrought nerves with the luxury of a good cry. Dora stood a moment to allow them a brief rest; then her will took command of them again. Resolutely shutting her mind to a chaotic contemplation—neither thought nor coherent memory; which brought that strange strangling in her throat, she went upstairs, forcing both face and manner to an indifference as complete as though she

had just taken her part in an ordinary morning call. There, sternly disregarding the sensible rebellion of nature, testified by a physically uncontrollable tremulousness of every limb, she began to gather together and lay in order the various details of her toilette for a dance she was to attend that night.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"You're not going out again to-night, are you, Sam?"

Arkwright, who certainly had got up from the supper-table with that object, looked slightly uncomfortable. He stood with his hand on his overcoat, arrested in the act of taking it down from the peg.

"Only just for an hour or so," he said, in a conciliatory, half-shamed voice. "I shan't be late, old lady."

Sarah could not force her face to the inexpressiveness of her tongue. The sigh she suppressed betrayed itself in the unsuspected wistfulness of her sad pale

eyes; they were often heavy eyes in these days, too.

Her husband took down his coat, and shook himself into it with a touch of impatience.

"A fellow must have a bit of amusement sometimes," he said. "You don't think I'm after any harm?"

"I don't think *you* are, but I'm not so sure your friends aren't. And if they don't mean any by you—oh! Sam, can any touch pitch without being defiled? Oh! Sam, forgive me; I feel as if I should be unfaithful to be silent any longer. The others—— I didn't *know* anything against them, and I've tried to think better of them than I feel. But when it comes to that Mr. Westoby——"

"I don't know why you've taken up such a dislike to *him*," said Sam. "He's not half a bad fellow—clever, too. He's pretty

well worked out a notion in cart-brakes that's the neatest thing I've seen for a long time. He showed me just the way of it the other day in the shops. Of course, he's had a rough sort of life, and he don't set up for being a saint ; but a man needn't be such a shocking bad lot as you make out, because he ain't just all that."

"Sam, it isn't only what I know of the sort of man he is from having been in his company myself. I didn't tell you, because I hoped there wouldn't be any need ; but Mr. Graham was up here a day or two back, and he said how sorry he was you seemed so taken with Mr. Westoby—he had never known any good come of it to anybody. He's a good man, Sam, as well as a good master ; he said for all Mr. Westoby did such a big business with him, he'd be sorry for the day he'd ever seen him or his money, if you got into trouble by getting to know

him while you were in *his* employ, even though it was only by taking orders; he said he'd never had a foreman he thought such a deal of, Sam," she added, with a rather forlorn attempt at propitiation. "He said he would never speak to him himself about anything but waggons. He said he'd given you a hint, but he was afraid you didn't but half believe him."

"He told me the detectives wouldn't believe in the character of an angel that was as thick with Mr. Westoby as I looked to be," returned Sam, "if he calls that a hint. If they are such fools, they may be, for me. For that matter, I daresay, half the stories about him are just yarns; there's tales about everybody. And at the worst—well! I. D. B. ain't murder. It's only in this blessed place that the officials seem to think you may make holes in all the Commandments cheaper than you can in this one of their own making.

The whole thing is half lawyer's rot—a made-up crime, worried out by a beastly system. It's my belief that they and their precious traps make half the cases they're so cock-a-hoop about finding themselves; and I'm not the only one that thinks it, neither. I'll make bold to say there's cleaner hands to be found among certain poor wretches on the Breakwater than some in the Department that sent them there. I know whose conscience *I*'d sooner have of the two—put it at the worst."

"Sam, dear, I know you don't mean such things; you couldn't be wanting to defend dishonesty—stealing. But don't go talking that way, outside; don't, dear. It isn't safe; other people won't know you don't mean it."

"I *do* mean it," replied Sam, being now well mounted on a hobby.

His temperament did give him a very special aversion to the system, and his mind

was not more logical than is that of the general public; which is indeed a sentimental rather than a reasoning body. "This system is bad; therefore the sufferers under the system are, if not exactly saints, at least martyrs." The general public sees no incoherence in such a statement as that; and from the martyr to the hero is the most elementary step in popular apotheosis.

"Never mind, missus; you needn't take on about me," added Sam. "I'm not going in for the trade myself. Trust me for that; look at it all round and the risk ain't worth it."

He nodded, cheerfully, and went out, his momentarily ruffled temper restored already to its usual state of sunny calm. But Sarah went back into the room with a great despair growing about her heart. She sat down by the table, folding her hands upon it in unwonted idleness; then,

with an instinct almost as much of the wearied body as of the harassed soul, she dropped suddenly to her knees, and let the waves of the accumulated bitterness of many weeks roll over her bowed head.

"The risk not worth it!" Was that all he had to go upon? A poor defence, indeed, against a temptation whose power over him she greatly overrated. "He that maketh haste to be rich shall fall into temptation and a snare." Had he not thrown up work which gave him—she saw it with pleasure, though she could not understand—a valuable practical influence over souls, merely to "better himself?"—hateful words! Well, to escape some trifling annoyances, no doubt, incident to his changed position under the new dynasty. Sarah, who had served many months' apprenticeship to far more serious discomforts, was tempted to think this but the reason of feeble folk.

When a move had been first proposed, she had pleaded against this particular one with a warmth which she seldom put into any argument involving an opposition to his wish. She had pleaded as she would have pleaded for his soul, for, indeed, she believed no less than that to be at stake. Nor had there been anything in his conduct since their arrival calculated to reassure her. He seemed to her to have got loose from his moorings altogether; she felt no moment's security that he was not drifting, in sheer gaiety of heart, to moral shipwreck.

He was not doing this; but she was so far right in her ideas as that Sam was certainly, just now, mentally, a little *grisé*. He was like a schoolboy in his first holidays. After the seclusion, the propriety, the thousand conventionalities of Beulah, Kimberley seemed to him a perfect Liberty Hall, and he was disposed to make the

most of it. He did not take much harm; there was a certain soundness and sweetness of nature about him which refused to assimilate nastiness in any shape. But it cannot be denied that he was tolerably silly—his innate boyishness seeming to effervesce rather than settle down—and that his choice of associates did but little credit to his common-sense; though Westoby alone, perhaps, came under the head of actual bad company.

Sam's "half-an-hour or so" lengthened out, as his wife had well expected, to an hour long past her usual bed-time. She did not sit up; she knew he disliked it, though he had never shown temper on the subject, and, since it seemed she could not save, she would do nothing for mere reproach. But the anxiety which banished sleep was certainly not lightened as she lay listening to Westoby's unmistakable voice

and laugh on the stoep, rolling its bass thunder for long after the sound of Sam's step had let her know of his return. It was quite a quarter-of-an-hour before Sam did actually enter the house. He paused at the door of the room, turning the handle, at last, with such elaborate quietness, and entering with such tip-toe precaution, that she had not the heart to refuse the innocent deception of a sleep he so evidently hoped to find. But she seemed to be able to see with her ears; certain sounds—the click of a lock, the chink of coin, counted out with caution, a low whistle of disconcertion—these haunted her heart for days; then they faded like other ghosts, and lurked, unseen, in wait for her dark hour.

The cautious steps went out again; the door shut; once more Westoby's voice smote her ear—he was not gone, then. Now he was, though; the heavy, lounging

step died in the distance, and Sam came back. She could not have spoken now.

Westoby, strolling back to his rooms in Thompson Street, was thinking little enough of her, though little beyond a desire to annoy her had prompted him to get up an intimacy in which he found not much of either interest or profit. Such wretched winnings as he had taken from Arkwright that evening were not worth dignifying with the name; and he knew this young man's character so much better than did the young man's wife, that he would never have wasted time in trying to make a tool of him. For the rest, if Arkwright should suffer in reputation by this association, that was his affair; it is just to say that Westoby had never really given a thought to that side of the subject. He did want to torment Sarah; he had no particular desire to inflict serious injury on Sam. It was scarcely like Westoby

to go out of his way thus, for no advantage beyond the gratification of what he would have called, "pure cussedness;" but it was not the only matter in which, in these days, he was not quite like his old self.

At his rooms, he found, to his surprise, Christian Dreyer waiting for him. The canteen-keeper was, by no means, a frequent visitor. Now, too, it was barely eleven o'clock, and Dreyer seldom left the bar at night before closing time. It was, therefore, presumable that he had something of importance to communicate. His face, when he turned it on Westoby's entrance, implied the same; it was anxious, at once deprecatory and remonstrant.

Westoby threw himself into a chair.

"Well?" he said, shortly; and beyond a sufficiently curt nod on entering, that was all the greeting he vouchsafed.

Dreyer cleared his throat; his eyes

sought the other's face, as if reconnoitring, and seemed to find nothing reassuring. In fact, of late, Westoby's temper had been more often bad than good.

"Well?" repeated Westoby. "Look alive, now; I suppose you ain't come over just for the pleasure of looking at me?"

Dreyer, resting one elbow on the table, and making as though to shield his eyes from the lamp-light, said from behind his hand:

"Wronsky's back."

Wronsky was the most redoubtable member of the detective police, who had been home on leave.

"'Queen Anne's dead,'" retorted Westoby, contemptuously. "You never came over to tell *me* that?"

"He'll be making things lively for the trade," said Dreyer, still tentatively. "They

say he's been over to Paris, and I don't know where all; brought back no end of wrinkles."

Westoby merely shrugged; the gesture neither contradicted nor confirmed. Dreyer seemed to screw up his courage.

"Well—it may be all lies, Baas, I don't know—but Heinemann came over to my place this afternoon, and he said——"

"Well?" said Westoby, for the third time; and now there was a suggestion of menace in his tone which forbade any such trifling as drawing back, though it was far from encouraging to proceed.

"Well!" said Dreyer, desperately, "he said that you were in the bar at the 'Bricklayers' Arms' last night."

"I was. Go on."

"And you ran on pretty free; had half a row with some of 'em over that missionary chap of yours — and there was names

brought in, and a good bit of tall talk, and he thought someone should give you a hint."

"He told you I was drunk, I suppose?"

Dreyer hesitated. "I didn't believe him," he said, conciliatingly; "I did think, maybe, you had been drinking."

"And if I had, did you ever know me lose my head for that?"

"No, Baas," he said, with truth. "But I have known it touch your temper; and if those fellows—I know which of 'em was there, and they're a low lot—if they were very riling, I don't know but what you may have said more than you meant or thought for. Anyway, that's what he said."

Westoby rose to his feet.

"Then you may curse him from me for a meddling, officious blockhead," he returned, furiously; "and tell him if he wants to let me know that he thinks I'm a d—d whiskey-

sodden fool, that don't know when to keep a close mouth, he'd best come to me next time and say it to my face."

He threw himself into his chair again; Dreyer waited till he had let off enough of his temper in expletives, to admit a hope of getting a patient hearing.

"There ain't no use in taking it like that," he said, shaking his head mournfully. "Like enough you said nothing that mightn't be said fair enough among friends, and no harm thought. If that was all, I reckon he might have brought his messages himself, before I thought to take 'em. But it ain't."

He paused; except that Westoby had ceased to mutter, it was not easy to say whether he was attending or no.

"Because Heinemann says that after you were gone out, he could take his oath he saw Wronsky in the bar; he must have

been there all the time, for Heinemann was by the door, and he knows no one came in while the row was going on. He says Wronsky was made up so as his own mother wouldn't have known him; but he swears it was him, and I never did know that chap mistaken yet."

"Didn't you?" said Westoby, sarcastically. He paused a moment; Dreyer hoped that he was taking a serious view of the case. The next words disappointed him. "You mean that you never knew him ready to swear that a man *wasn't* a detective, not that you ever knew him make any bones about swearing he *was*. Of course, if a chap starts with the craze that every party he can't ticket off quite clear in his mind is bound to be *that*, it's long odds but what he's right once in a hundred times or so."

"You don't believe it?"

"Not without a deal more evidence than the notion of a chap that goes about in one everlasting funk, like him."

Dreyer relapsed into silence; he watched Westoby carefully, but could see nothing to guide him as to whether this incredulity was assumed or real.

"Then you ain't going to take any notice?" he ventured at last.

"No, if you particularly want to know, I'm not."

There was another pause; then, looking everywhere except at Westoby, Dreyer said, in a would-be airy tone which was a signal failure:

"Hadn't I better give the Reverend a hint, anyway?"

Westoby's temper was ablaze in an instant.

"*No*, confound you!" he thundered, furiously. "Haven't I told you I wouldn't

have you putting your finger into that pie? I'd be glad to know how much mischief you've done with your — meddling already. If I find any trouble in that quarter, I shall know who I have to thank."

"It won't be me, Baas, anyhow," replied Dreyer. The nature of his errand had prepared him for such infinite possibilities in the way of Westoby's temper, that no display could greatly surprise him. "I've never said a word to him in that way but what I've had from you. And as for trouble—I reckon you may make your mind easy on that score. I don't believe the poor chap has a kick left in him, by now."

"'Poor chap!'" sneered Westoby. "Only the other day you were fit to split your sides over the notion; now you're for ever snivelling over him. Your Dutch sentiment!" he broke out, savagely. Then with a change to as savage sarcasm:

"Better go and take him some of those tracts he used to let off on you; tell him he's been a sad naughty boy, but his mammy's waiting for him at home, and got his little old pinny to wipe his eyes with, if he'll go right back and say he's sorry."

"No," said Dreyer, nettled for a moment beyond prudence or forbearance. "Your Mrs. Arkwright can do that dodge better nor me. I'll leave it to her."

The change in Westoby's face went beyond anything his already repentant companion had anticipated. It was as if, up till now, he had only been playing at passion. His manner, under the very stress of his rage, acquired a sort of self-control. He pointed to the door.

"If you've made fool enough of yourself for one night, I reckon you'd better go," he said, heavily.

Dreyer, much wishing his words unsaid, took the hint. He gained the door in silence. There he lingered a moment, fumbling with the lock.

"Only a joke, Baas," he said, deprecatingly. "Come to that, he seems as anxious to give her a wide berth, when she does come, as you could wish; and it's not often she's over, anyway. There's nothing in that; but if you could give a thought to that notion of Heinemann's——"

He broke off. Westoby, standing by the table, his great fists clenched and his eyes almost hidden beneath the heavy frown of his shaggy brows, might have been deaf and blind. Further expostulation was obviously useless and might be dangerous; Dreyer did not make the experiment.

Outside in the street there were few passengers; the moon was bright and strong; a clock struck the half-hour before

midnight. Dreyer walked on slowly, shaking his head a little now and again.

"I hope he'll think it over; I hope he will. He never was a man to take a hint of that sort as one might say kindly; but I've known him act on it afterwards, though he might swear at the time. But I don't quite know what's come to him just now. I reckon, though, I'll take it on myself to give the missionary a hint. It can't hurt, anyway; if this should be all my eye, why, he'll not split on me, I'll be bound. And if it's a deal too true to be pleasant, maybe the Baas'll live to thank me for the job, himself." (This was to be very sanguine, indeed, for Westoby had little more tolerance for profitable than for unprofitable disobedience. But, in truth, Dreyer had not the nerve to face a crisis of such apparent gravity, in total inaction. He must feel he was doing something to avert it.) "I don't know why he

is always so down upon that Runciman fellow," his thoughts wandered on; "he's done well enough for us so far. If he don't take care, I'm thinking the poor chap'll slip through his fingers. He looks now as if he was walking about to save funeral expenses. But I do hope he'll think this over."

His thoughts had brought him to the end of the street. As he was on the point of crossing over, a cab dashed out of Market Square into the Transvaal Road. Something made him stand to watch it. It rattled on some two hundred yards further, then drew up where—red-yellow in the white moonlight—the lamp over the Police Station broke the blank line of the wall of the gaol. He could just distinguish figures. Two men got down, then a third; even at that distance a practised eye could read the situation in the varying action. The cab drove off.

Dreyer's face took on a sickly shade.

"*Allemagtig!*" he groaned, interiorly; "I knew it—he's beginning! I wonder, now, which of the fellows is that?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

The dance at the Pirate's Club had worked up from its first tepid beginnings to the full glow of enjoyment; the well-lighted room was full of scent and music and the sliding rustle of twinkling feet, the high-pitched chatter of cheerful voices, the flutter of whirling muslin and lace.

Dora Solomon was in unusual spirits. Under the influence of the excitement of the dance, which she could feel like any other girl, the revenge which had, for a while threatened to taste but dust and ashes after all, seemed to fulfil everything that she had ever dreamed of it. The memory of that

hour glowed in her veins like wine; her heart beat to a measure which, of European races, the Celtic alone, perhaps, can fully understand. The vision, haunting still, of a cowed form, a white face dark with helpless wrath, now seemed necessary to her complete satisfaction; she could as little have spared it from her thought as could the hero of a triumph have dispensed with the train of captives behind his car.

The last hurrying bars of a waltz had ended in a few unwelcome chords; the dancers were betaking themselves to seats, or promenading round the room in couples, after South African fashion. Dora, seated not far from the entrance, was talking to her late partner, a youth fresh from England, with unwonted graciousness, and watching with an amused eye, more indulgent than usual, the varying humours of the march past, when she noticed one of the attendants,

standing doubtfully in the door-way, scrutinizing the different groups. She drew her companion's attention to the man.

"He seems to be looking for someone," she said.

"Perhaps Dr. Brown is trying Bob Sawyer's dodge of getting himself advertised," he replied; but before Dora could answer, the man was standing before her.

"There's a gentleman outside wants to speak to you, Miss Solomon," he said.

"Me?" she said, incredulously. "You must have made a mistake."

"No, miss; it was you, for sure. And he said as he must see you at once."

Dora stood up, with a touch of annoyance in her manner.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"He didn't give no name, miss."

The girl turned to her partner.

"I suppose I must interview this very

mysterious individual, for myself," she said, with a short laugh; and behind the circling couples she passed out with little attention excited.

The attendant led the way to the room set apart for the ladies' cloak-room. He left her at the door; going in she found herself in the presence of a man somewhat on the hither side of middle age—a stranger to her. Dora looked a rather haughty interrogation.

"Miss Solomon, I believe?" said the stranger. His voice was quiet, but not annoyingly subdued.

She slightly bowed an assent. He went across to the door, which she had left a little ajar, and closed it. Then she noticed that the maid in charge of the cloak-room was gone. Something in her breast seemed to give a little warning flutter—enough to signal her to self-control. The man came back into the room.

"My name is Wronsky," he said, and paused.

The flutter was in her throat, now; she put one gloved hand suddenly on the back of a chair, but lying there it did not visibly tremble.

The detective went on, after a moment:

"It has unfortunately been my duty to arrest your father for a contravention of the Diamond Trade Act. I thought I should not be going beyond what my superiors would justify me in, by granting his request that you should be allowed to see him before —before he goes."

She bent her proud head for some half minute; turned red and pale. Wronsky watched her with some anxiety. Before he had quite prepared himself for hysterics, she looked up.

"I will come at once," she said, quietly, and already even her colour seemed to be

coming under her control. "I must thank you for your considerateness. It would not have been pleasant for me to have felt that I had been dancing, while he was—— To have come home to find him——" She stopped; for all her coolness it was not easy to say the actual words. "You need not call the maid, thank you," she added, as he was leaving the room, with a muttered suggestion to that effect; "I shall want no assistance."

She had already turned to look for her opera-cloak among the bright-coloured heaps of cashmere and plush.

The detective went out.

"By Jove!" he said to himself, with infinite relief; "she's a good plucked one. *She* ought to have been the man, rather than that poor-spirited old fellow over there. It's not from him she gets her nerve, anyway;" for he had not been favourably impressed

with poor Mr. Solomon's bearing in presence of calamity.

He had scarcely got further in his reflections before Dora came out, cloaked and hooded. She felt more eyes upon her than there were, but made no sign of feeling any.

In the cab she was alone on the back seat; the detective got up in front beside the driver. In a short ten minutes they were at the house. They got down; the driver was bidden to wait. Her escort opened the house door himself, then that into the dining-room, standing aside to let her pass, then following her in.

She looked round her with clear eyes. On a chair near the door sat a second detective, stolidly, but certainly manifesting no obnoxious glee in the situation. He did not seem to feel it improved by the importation of a woman into it, to judge by the look he exchanged with Wronsky behind

her back. There was a smell of spirits in the room; a bottle, and a nearly-emptied tumbler of brandy-and-water stood on the table.

"Mr. Solomon felt a bit upset, miss," said his guardian, in a voice which took something of an exculpatory tone from the indignant suspicion which darkened the girl's eyes as she turned them upon him. "A bit upset; but he's better now."

He might have been that; but he was not much to boast of, even so. Huddled together on the big heavy leather sofa, his eyes sunk, his face haggard, his pale lips loose and tremulous, he looked ten years older than the father from whom she had parted three hours before. As soon as he saw her, he began to cry. The detectives exchanged a glance and shrug.

"I have brought your daughter, Mr. Solomon," said Wronsky. "I must ask you

to be quick about your leave-taking. I have done all I dare in delaying so long already."

Dora had gone across to the old man. He looked that now. She put one hand firmly on his shoulder.

"Mr. Wronsky is quite right, father," she said, in a voice of clear, not unkind decision. Her manner was that of a forbearing but very sensible nurse to a feeble-minded patient. "It was kind in him to allow us this meeting at all; we can't expect him to wait much longer."

The look which the second detective here exchanged with his associate was one of blank amazement. The two withdrew slightly, though not out of earshot; they made some pretence of being interested in the furniture of the room, in the two or three very much framed pictures on the walls, but could not quite refrain

from curious glances at the father and daughter.

Indeed, it was a strange scene. Mr. Solomon was still cowering on the sofa, a broken, limp, whimpering old man, his hair dishevelled, his very clothes—ill-fitting at the best of times—seeming to participate in the general disorder and dismay. Over him stood Dora. She had cast aside the muffler which she had thrown over her head, and there was a sparkle of jewels among the thick black coils and plaits of her hair. She stood a little bent down over him; one fine bare arm, from which the crimson cloak had fallen back, was half round his shoulder; the other, hanging by her side, was hidden all but the white gloved hand which still unconsciously held her fan. Beneath her cloak, her ball-dress fell in a misty cloud. She was pale; but the complete, the even commanding composure of both face and

manner, was little short of bewildering. In the shadow of the very grip of the law, she was not only uncowed, she was actually mistress of the situation.

"Come, father," she began. She spoke gently, but her voice did not falter, and her tone was stimulating rather than coaxing. "You had something to tell me, hadn't you? Come, you mustn't fret yourself like this. Why, dear me! you may be back to-morrow."

She tried to speak as if she thought this probable, but her conviction was so much to the contrary that the attempt was a failure. It was plain from his lack of response how entirely he was at one with her very gloomiest secret forebodings.

She changed her line of consolation.

"And if the worst comes to the worst," she said "(we'll hope it won't, but there's no harm in being prepared), still you must

try and put a good face on it. It wouldn't be nice, of course, but I don't suppose it would be as bad as one thinks—oh, not nearly!—nothing ever is. And, even if it should be all that, it would only be just at first: one gets used to things so soon."

She made a little movement, half caress, half encouragement, with the hand that lay upon his bowed neck. He did but begin to rock himself to and fro, muttering, "My poor girl! my poor girl!"

"You mustn't worry about me," she said, firmly; "I should manage. (Mind, I'm only saying all this because I don't want you to be bothered even for twenty-four hours—not because I really think there'll be any need.) *If* there was, I should write to Victoria West, to cousin Rachel; she'd be glad enough to come and stay with me, I've no doubt. She must have had more than

enough of being genteel slavey in such a bear-garden as Adelaide Cohen's house; but she would never have spirit to make a change for herself." She forced herself even to speak lightly, to smile. Indeed, marvellous though this scene in its composure and presence of mind seemed to the spectators, it was really, so far, but the final staging of words and plans which she had rehearsed long since and often—so clearly had she foreseen this end from the beginning. "As for the business," she went on, "you can trust Monty Lyons, and you can trust me; we must do the best we can between us. I daresay we shall be able to keep things going."

He lifted his head from his hands, and stole a pitiful, timid look at her face; then turned his own aside.

"Oh! Lord," he groaned, "however shall I tell her!"

The detective coughed with a sound of impatience, and made a step forward.

"Oh! father," cried Dora, despairingly, "don't be afraid. Do tell me anything there is to tell. I can bear it."

But his lamentations alone answered her.

Wronsky came to the other side of the pair.

"Now, sir," he said; took Mr. Solomon by the arm, and tried to pull him to his feet. At the touch the wretched man wrenched himself away, starting up with a sudden vigour that surprised everybody.

"You might have a little patience," he cried, in a sort of tremulous falsetto of anguish. "Maybe you have a girl of your own at home. Would you find it so easy to tell her she was a beggar—that you had made her one?"

Then his momentary passion died out all

at once ; he sank back on to the sofa, covering his face with his great coarse, jewelled hands.

"Now you have it," he moaned ; "oh ! my poor girl, my poor girl ! And I've got to leave you."

There was a silence. For a moment or so Dora's breath came and went with a little catch ; her eyes travelled from her father to the detectives with almost a touch of piteousness, of appeal, in their depths. She was but a woman, after all, and she was so very much alone to bear up under this quite unexpected blow. He who had the power to inflict it, had none to sustain her under it ; all her strength must come from herself, and just at first the very consciousness of this seemed to depress her below fighting-mark. In two minutes she had rallied.

"Do you mean really ruined, father," she

said, steadily, "or is that just a way of putting it?"

"There's no way of putting it could make it out a worse smash than it is," he replied miserably. "It will all have to go —house, furniture, everything. I have beggared you, my girl; your father has beggared you. And I meant it for the best; I meant——"

And then he went on in rambling sentences, which might have been meant for explanation, but which were chiefly a moaning jumble of incoherent anathemas against himself, promoters, directors, shares, the very gold itself; against everything and everybody. Dora scarcely heard; she was only thinking that she must not yet begin to think—putting all the energy of her will into the turning away of the eyes of her mind from the abyss just opened at her feet, till she should have solitude and leisure in

which to look. Meanwhile, she brought back a sort of mechanical attention to her father. He was talking on now, in a mazed sort of way, seeming scarcely conscious of his situation or surroundings.

"And just for want of time. Another week, and I should have made all straight—a little week—a little week. Less, less, less! Only four-and-twenty hours, and the stuff would have been safe." He struck his head with his clenched fist. "Fool that I was to keep——"

Dora stooped suddenly; she put her arms round his neck and smothered the sentence in a kiss.

"Never mind, father," she said; "I must say good-bye now, but I'll be sure to be seeing you again in a few days, and by then I shall have had time to look round a little; things mayn't be so bad as you think, after all. I shall send a line to

Monty Lyons first thing to-morrow morning, and he'll come and talk it over." Then in a hurried whisper under cover of an embrace: "For goodness' sake, father, don't give yourself away like that; where's the sense? Surely, you have been cautioned? Do try and pull yourself together? Good-bye, dear, good-bye!"

Wronsky always affirmed that it was she who gave him the final signal, at this point, with her imperious eyes. This time there was no trouble; Mr. Solomon seemed to have sunk into a state of dazed quiescence; too limp to make any effort for himself, he submitted to be moved about as they might choose. He did not speak again, only moaned a little, wringing his hands in a distraught kind of way. In less than two minutes, the sound of the cab-wheels was dying in the distance.

Dora locked and bolted the front-door,

making all fast for the night; the metallic clicking sounds, echoing through the empty house, struck upon her ear with a dispiriting effect. It was not nervousness at all. The Colonial girls are few who will willingly, even sleep in a room by themselves; but it caused this one no fear, that, except for a Kaffir boy, sleeping the sleep of the native, just in a little tin lean-to in the yard, she was alone in the house. She was glad to feel alone; to dare, even to be obliged to think. Slowly she extinguished the lamp in the passage, and went back into the dining-room. She felt as if she could realize things better there; and she must realize them.

For a moment, she lingered on the threshold. All still the same, and yet all changed. How rich she had been that afternoon, how triumphant! Now it was not yet midnight, and she stood there,

mistress still in appearance, in truth a beggar and disgraced. Her glance took in all the signs of comfort, of well-nigh affluence. They were not very refined or artistic signs, it is true, but they were writ large and unmistakable, and were of a nature to appeal to Dora's imagination, which was eminently practical, as no mere æstheticism could ever have done. All gone! Withered with a word; as little hers now, or for evermore, as though she lay already in the last great poverty, dispossessed of earth, for ever in her coffin. A beggar! a beggar! She stood there with the jewels on her arms and neck, "rose-lined from the cold" in satin softnesses, and herself seemed to mock herself with her splendour.

Poor Dora! She was not naturally a tender woman, and she was a very proud one; it was scarcely wonderful, that in these

first moments she thought more of her own calamities, than of those of the father who had brought them on her—and that, largely, by disregarding her earnest advice in every particular. Presently she went slowly over to the sofa, sat down, and leaned her elbow on her knee, covering her face with her hand; and, by-and-bye, some great slow tears welled up into her eyes, and brimmed over, and then yet others, and she did not try to check them. They were the only ones she ever wasted on the situation, and nobody saw them; they need not be grudged her. When, after a very few minutes, she looked up again, she felt the better for them; more soft in heart, less tense in nerve and brain. She took out her handkerchief to wipe the tears away; the little flimsy lace and lawn fiction was wet through at the first touch. She threw it aside.

"People aren't expected to cry in ball

dresses," she said, half-aloud, with a rather bitter humour.

She stood up and went to the window. Shutters are unknown in the land; she pulled back the handsome furniture-shop looking curtains, and stared out into the moonlight. The shadows of the infant gum-trees lay in vague wavering grey flecks upon the garden path; across the road, the serried spears of the aloes on the bank above the ditch, stood up sharp and black against the silver-flooded sky. The gate stood open, as if awaiting a return—and the return should never be.

Dora, looking out now with undimmed eyes, made herself no illusions on that point. If she had already heard the sentence pronounced, she could not have felt more certain of it. With the clear-sightedness which she really could not help, even when it almost seemed cynical to herself, she put it at eight years.

(It may be said at once that the event proved her correct.)

Eight years! Her intelligence looked at it clearly and steadily enough, but her heart shrank back. She was still young enough for eight years to seem a very formidable space of time. And hard labour; for a man of his age who had scarcely done a stroke of manual work in his life; who hated work of that description with the abhorrence common to his race! Her heart softened to him; it followed him to the cell which he must even now be entering, and she would have liked to be able to be with him, to comfort him, at least through this first miserable night.

"Poor father!" she thought, "it's worse for him than for me."

For her! She paused and looked down the vista of the years; there was no perplexity in her expression, no anxious search-

ing of a dim and doubtful future, only a steadily faced certainty.

"I must sell as much of my jewels and own things as will fetch anything; that will pay for the rent of a small room, up at Newton or somewhere, for two or three months till my work begins to bring something in. It will have to be dressmaking; my temper is too bad for teaching, and people don't advertise for young *women* with good business capacity and a competent knowledge of book-keeping. If they did, I should get on well enough. As it is, I shall make two ends meet; there's plenty of people will help me to a connection. And, by-and-bye, when this has blown over a little and people begin to forget—it won't be long, next year, most likely—Monty Lyons will ask me again to marry him; and this time I shall. He will marry me for my brains; well! that's better than to be

married for one's face or one's fortune. And I—I shall marry him for his, and for a home; for me and for father when he comes out. I would marry a fool for that, but I shan't need to marry a fool. We respect each other, and understand each other; Monty will get on in the world. I shall not be unhappy."

She sighed though; it is not cheerful to see the future so clearly as this girl saw it, even when that future is not actively disagreeable. The possibilities of life are its best features, perhaps; and for Dora it held no possibilities any more—only necessities and their necessary consequences. For a while longer she stood, with firm lips and eyes neither sad nor bright, fixed only with looking on immutable fate. When some light-minded little clock in another room, glibly rattled off the strokes of midnight, she roused herself; she did not sigh again.

"Well, I must go to bed," she said. "It's no use sitting up all night—that can't help him, and I must rest. I shall want all my wits about me to-morrow."

She fetched a candle from outside and lighted it, then turned out the lamp and left the room. The drawing-room door just opposite had sprung open; she closed and locked it. In the very act of pulling it to the thought of the scene of the far-off afternoon came upon her for a moment. She had forgotten it; it seemed years ago, as much in point of interest as in time. Then, from the unstable vantage-ground of a prosperity which could not make her his equal, she had hated Gerald Blake; now, from the height of her calamity she could view him with indifference. She laughed, a little drearily, as she went lingeringly up the stair—the feature in the house of which she had been particularly proud.

"There isn't much to choose between our fortunes, now," she muttered. "If he cares for his revenge, he will have it to-morrow. He'll be for crying 'Quits'."

But Gerald never said anything of the sort.

CHAPTER XXX.

Gerald Blake, walking westward towards where a red-gold sunset was burning out of dusk, seeing nothing of splendour in heaven or of hope on earth, furious with shame past and desperate with disgrace to come, reached at last the boarding-house where, on sufferance, he still lived. He went straight to his room, meeting no one, and locked himself in. He pulled down the blind, and at once it was night. The room, looking south into a small yard, was so dark that he had to light a candle to find what he wanted ; he almost laughed, with a sort of impatience, as he did so. It seemed ridiculous to want a light to

shoot oneself by; a light for these few minutes before one would have done with light for ever. He opened a drawer, took out his revolver, and threw it on the table. Then, as if the touch and sight had given him at least a little patience, seeing that the way of escape was now so clear and sure, he stood a little looking round the room.

There was not in all Kimberley a room more bare, now, of every personal luxury than this which, three or four months ago, had been crammed with every species of masculine vanities. There was not a thing left that could be turned into money; the very drawers, he knew, were empty. A little old linen, the clothes he actually wore, a few shillings in his purse: the sum of his earthly possessions was named. Well! it did not matter now. He should never go the way that woman had bidden him; that triumph, at least she would never have.

He turned, and took up the revolver. It was clean—in good order; this was not the first time of late that he had faced this contingency. Now it was come; there was nothing to wait for, yet he waited. It was not from any hesitation in his purpose. There was nothing to make him hesitate. He had absolutely no religious instinct that could have restrained him. He could not be said to doubt, because he had never considered the subject enough to get so far. People talk of an unreasoning faith; Gerald was happy in the possession of an unreasoning unbelief. Probably there is almost as much of the one in the world as of the other. In mere physical courage he did not belie the ordinary traditions of his class and nation; the only thing that could have made him hesitate to accept this solution would have been the faintest, most shadowy glimpse of any other. But he saw none;

he accepted this one, therefore, as a matter of course, but he did not pretend to be violently enamoured of it.

He sat down before the table and turned the weapon over in his hands, examining it with a strange mixture of bitter resentment at the fact that he was obliged to use it, and of bitter satisfaction at having it to use. The house was still, but it was six o'clock; he had just heard it strike in the town—his watch had been gone long since. In a few minutes his fellow-lodgers would be getting back from their stores and offices; there would be steps and laughter, and whistling and chaff. He would not wait to hear it though; why should he embitter the last moments by the contrast between his luck and theirs? It was sharp enough already.

He stood up and loaded. How should he do it? where should he aim? The brain was the surest. No, it need not be; he

knew the vital parts elsewhere, and *that*—— Once, in his rougher American experiences, Gerald had seen a man with his brains blown out; he looked now at the spot where he would fall, and saw—— No; he could not bring himself to think of looking like that. The heart; that would do—as sure, and nothing too disagreeable or ungentlemanly when he should be found. He felt about for a moment, then took careful aim. His finger was on the trigger; his hand was quite steady.

The house-door banged with a tremendous crash; a half-formed bass was trolling out a lively refrain in the passage; the first of Mrs. Benson's boarders had come home. A sudden blind rage was the latest emotion of which Blake was conscious; in the very act of it he fired.

"'Attempted suicide'! Dear me, dear

me, how sad! Only think, Sophy! 'Was removed to the hospital, where he lies in a precarious condition. Grave doubts are entertained of his recovery.' Dear, dear! and such a nice-looking gentlemanly young man. 'Money troubles are supposed to have been the cause of the rash act.' Ach! to think of that, now! I suppose that must have been why he has not been near us for so long while."

"What are you saying? Who is that you are reading about?"

Sophy held out a trembling hand across the breakfast table for the fatal sheet. For one moment her eyes, heavy and swollen with half a night of weeping, stared at the words, dilated with a stony horror; the next, she had slipped from her chair in a dead faint.

It would have been little consolation to

Gerald Blake, even if he could have known it, in the long days during which he lay hanging between life and death. Little even after the victory had declared for life, and a slow but steady recovery had set in. Spring was already in the land by the time he was able to sit out for a while every afternoon on the stoep. He knew, by then, that he had been asked after; but Mrs. Van Eyssen's cards of kind enquiry had accumulated into quite a respectable little heap long before he had been well enough to be told about them. They had been brought to him when he was still so weak that he had some ado not to actually cry with vexation; far too weak to tear them into the thousand pieces he would have desired. Why could not people let him be forgotten? This solicitude seemed all that was wanting to make him perfectly and absolutely ridiculous.

For he felt that now; and as the days

went on, and brought him ever nearer to the time when he must perforce go out again into ordinary life, he felt it more and more. Sitting on the stoep on one of these sunny afternoons in the cushioned Madeira chair, staring moodily into the garden, the illustrated paper with which he had been supplied slipping from his listless grasp, his thin, white hands lying nervelessly on the rug across his knees, he was feeling horribly, bitterly ashamed, not so much of his attempt as of his failure. He had been in situations before now out of which it had not been easy to come with dignity, but never in one so impossible as this. To be just where you were, with the addition of having made such a horrible fool of yourself! He called, quite pathetically, heaven and earth to witness that it was no fault of his that he was alive to-day. It was all his consistently atrocious luck. He did sincerely think it was atro-

cious, in the abstract. And yet, sitting there in the spring-tide, with the delicious languors of returning life creeping through him almost in his own despite, feeling, after all, deny it as he might, how good a thing and pleasant it is for the eyes to behold the sun, he was conscious of a sort of satisfaction in reflecting that not by the most depraved form of public opinion could he be reasonably expected to try the thing again.

With a sigh in which each of these emotions had its part, and in which physical weakness went for a good deal, too, he roused himself to the extent of picking up his paper. The shadow of the first of the castor-oil shrubs along the centre walk had crawled half way to the steps; he judged it was time they should bring him his tea. From want of all other distractions, Gerald had become quite learned in this primitive form of horology. He heard steps behind

him, coming through the ward, and the nurse's voice, but not addressed to him.

"Oh! yes, it will do him good. It's cheering up a little he wants more than anything else, now."

With a sudden foreboding, the reverse of cheerful, he half turned his head; even as he did so Mrs. Van Eyssen's decent black brushed against his chair, and behind Mrs. Van Eyssen came Sophy de Jongh. The colour rushed into Gerald's almost transparent face, till it was as crimson as a blushing girl's; he got to his feet with difficulty, raising himself by the arms of his chair, but was compelled to sink back even before Mrs. Van Eyssen's voluble remonstrances and entreaties gave him permission to do so. The nurse brought more chairs, and the visitors sat down.

Blake sat tongue-tied, absorbed in a desperate effort to look natural and at ease,

while the elder lady flowed on in a stream of words which waited for no answer—fortunately, for he did not even hear her.

How should he get rid of them? He almost wished he could faint—that wretched old woman's chatter was enough to justify an invalid in doing so—but that would have made him more conspicuous than he felt already. There was nothing for it but patience. So far as Mrs. Van Eyssen was concerned, this was rewarded soon enough—far sooner than he would have desired, when he came to see the infinitely worse behind. She stood up.

"We mustn't tire you, Mr. Blake," she said, suggestively.

Of course, Gerald was constrained to deny the possibility of their doing so; he did it with the courage of generations of traditional courtesy, without flinching.

"Not? It is true, eh?" she replied,

with an innocent satisfaction in her transparent artifice for which he could gladly have strangled her. "Then, Sophy, dear, I think I will try and see poor Mrs. Ferreira. I shan't be longer as ten minutes, eh? You won't mind to wait so long? because she can't bear to see a new face, poor soul! You're sure you won't mind?"

She went back into the ward.

On the stoep the spring wind rustled the leaves of Gerald's paper, which had once more fallen at his feet; the voices of children came fitfully from a further wing; a couple of natives, passing to and fro with water for the garden, exchanged an ejaculatory jabber at intervals, as they met at the tap or crossed each other on the paths; at intervals, too, came the swish of the water from their cans and pails. These sounds punctuated the silence in which these two sat—a silence in which she looked at him, with

her soul too plainly in her dull, wistful eyes, and he looked at the pattern on the rug, at the advertisements on the back of the paper, till he found afterwards that, though he had not been conscious of seeing either, both had burned themselves for ever into his brain. Presently, she spoke—

"You have been very sick," she said.

There was a sort of protest in the rather faltering tones.

"Oh, pretty well, I believe," he replied, with a grim kind of lightness. He did not look at her.

There was a pause, in which her breath came brokenly. He heard it with a pang of shame so keen it turned to anger; he was not used to feel ashamed.

"Oh!" she cried, all at once, and he did not need to see her pale face to know that the tears were in her eyes; "oh! Mr. Blake, how could you be so wicked, and so—so cruel?"

This was too horrible. What, of silence or of speech, could he think of that would most discourage her? For what was she not, on the slightest encouragement, ready to say? And she must not say it; by all his hopes of self-respect for ever, she must say nothing he could not affect to misunderstand. To marry for money—there was nothing much in that; everyone did it that could—but, having failed in his attack on the heiress by direct means, to have it hinted, sneered, that he had compassed his purpose by a vulgar stratagem—the stratagem of some melodramatic cad of a shop-assistant! It was not to be endured.

"Everything that is said in that way, Miss de Jongh, only makes me rather more sorry I couldn't manage it."

He spoke, on purpose, even more ungraciously than he felt; Sophy's shocked face was a grim satisfaction to him.

"You must be very wicked—or—" she added, with a ready excuse for which he was by no means grateful, "or you have been very unhappy, to make you talk like that. Were you very miserable?" she asked, plaintively.

"Not half so miserable then, as I have been since, as I am now," he said, with sullen bitterness. "I must have been mad to think that I had come to the worst."

"Yes, that was it;" she took him up, almost eagerly. "You were not in your right senses, not for a minute, and then before you knew——They say one can be like that when one is very unhappy. I don't know. I have been very unhappy too—sometimes," she added, with most undeceptive haste. "I don't think anyone can ever have been more unhappy as me. But I never did feel as if I must do *—that.*"

He looked at her, and laughed slightly; there was little mirth in the sound.

"I hope you never may, Miss de Jongh," he said. "And, now suppose we talk of something pleasanter?'

He felt it was useless; and, in fact, his words scarcely reached her understanding. She was looking at him, now, with the old wistfulness, taking in every detail of his altered appearance.

"You are better?" she said; "much better? You will be quite better soon?"

"I'm afraid so."

This time she took no notice.

"When you are quite better, and come out of the hospital, what shall you do? where do you think to go?"

"Where shall I go?" he cried, with a sudden strength of fury. "If there are any ends of the earth where I shall never see a creature I ever knew or that ever

knew me, I shall go there. I shall look for it anyhow."

She dropped her head, and her eyes beneath her veil.

"No, Mr. Blake," she said, almost in a whisper, "don't do that."

Confound that old woman! was she never coming back? He pretended not to have heard; he would have given worlds to think of any remark, however blankly silly, that would make a diversion. But it was a task to which his still shaken nerves and enfeebled brain were honestly unequal.

"See, Mr. Blake," she went on, "it is like this." She could not be said to speak without embarrassment; her gentle monotonous voice was steady enough, indeed, but her eyes were cast down still, and she kept pulling nervously at the fingers of her gloves. "When it comes to death, or when one is frightened it has come to that, for oneself or

for one's—one's friends, I think one often sees things differently. There are things one wishes one had left unsaid, or had said differently; other things that——It is strange how it opens one's eyes—death!"

She paused, and stole a slow, obviously beseeching glance at him. He would not take the slightest notice; he sat with his hands clenched in the intensity of his annoyance, resigned to a sullen passiveness. Her confusion be upon her own head! He had done his best to stop her and she would not be stopped, now he washed his hands of the whole affair. This was his fault, too, he supposed? Of course! everything was always his fault.

"And when—when a kind Providence has heard one," continued the poor girl, "and mercifully spared the life one did fear for, whether one's own or someone else's—it seems as if it would be wrong and

ungrateful to forget the things for which one had wished to make amends. That would be wicked; don't you think so, Mr. Blake?"

"Really, Miss de Jongh," he said frigidly, "I don't feel competent to say. You could scarcely have come to a worse judge about a question of morals."

She gave him a little patient puzzled look; it was evident she did not understand.

"When you spoke to me that afternoon, I did mean what I said. But I was angry. There was someone . . . a young lady . . . had been saying things . . . making me think—— But she has been punished." She spoke without a trace of personal vindictiveness, only with a simple, serious-minded satisfaction in a justified Providence. "And I have been punished, too. When I saw it was all lies—what had been said—because you cared so much that—that—it even made you——"

She broke off suddenly. As for Gerald he fairly blushed again, burningly, painfully; he could not help it yet. Sophy saw nothing; she had hidden her face in her hands; he could see by the rise and fall of her bosom that she was crying. What, in the name of all gentlehood, was he to do?

"Oh! Mr. Blake," she sobbed, from behind her sheltering hands, "do be a little kind; help me a little! Do you think I am not ashamed? that it is easy for a woman to say all this?"

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, don't cry, Miss de Jongh! I—I—If you knew what you make me feel! What a scoundrel, what an unutterable cad! I shall never forgive myself all the days of my life!"

He could have cried himself, with shame and perplexity.

"It is not *my* forgiveness you ought to

ask for that," she said, simply, on a sob. "And if there was anything else—anything for which you might have needed mine—I—I have forgiven you long ago."

"Forget me, then," he said, and he spoke sincerely; "forget me, Miss de Jongh. It is the kindest thing you can do for me, now. I will not add—the wisest thing for yourself; you are too generous for that to weigh with you."

She raised her head; in that moment, even in those dull eyes, one could see the pathetic love-light shining through tears.

"I—I can't be kind in that way," she said. Then she turned her head away, and almost wrung her hands. "Oh! you are cruel, cruel, to make me so ashamed!"

What could he do more? What but take her poor, wet hand in his own weak, white ones, and bow his head upon it, in a transport of more genuine emotion—were it

only gratitude and honest shame—than he had ever yet known in his life?

"Sophy, Sophy!" he said, brokenly, "it is I that should be ashamed; I have not deserved this goodness. But since you are so forgiving—an angel of forgiveness, of compassion—— If anything I can be, anything I can do; if all my life's devotion can repay you a little—— Oh! Sophy, look at me, and tell me it may!"

She looked, and her face recalled the faces of certain Flemish Madonnas; transfigured with love and happiness, not into beauty, yet into something as good and more touching to look upon. She put her free hand on his; and if, in a place so public, there could be no other embrace, such was little needed to add assurance to the language of that simple action.

Half an hour later Gerald was back in

bed, too much exhausted in body to be very clear in mind, yet conscious that the life which he had thought, had wished over, which he had intended should be over, had been given back to him smoothed to a Sybarite softness of luxury. The cost had been some shame, some very bitter shame; there was still much to be faced in that way. Yet he was conscious—and for once justifiably conscious—of the rectitude of his intentions. Fate had intervened as usual; and when Fate takes the form of a woman, she is clearly irresistible, and also—one's conscience being clear of all complicity—in this instance to be forgiven. He forgave Fate: more—towards Sophy, Fate's instrument, he felt genuinely touched and humbled. He vowed, and he vowed sincerely, that never, never, should she have reason to regret this hour.

Perhaps she never had. Yet it is to be

remembered that at that time it was still a case of "when—a certain personage was sick." Perhaps, then, she had. To all appearance, though, she was content; "happy ever after." To all appearance: Heaven only knows the secret history of some women. Perhaps Heaven, that knows it, has compensations for them even here, were it only in the gift which makes forgiveness easy—the blessed gift of an infinite, eternally-renewed power of illusion and of hope.

CHAPTER XXXI.

In certain quarters the news of Mr. Solomon's arrest fell like a thunderbolt from a clear sky—so far as the sky of the I.D.B. can ever be said to be clear, which is, perhaps, not saying much. Still all things go by comparison, and it was some considerable time, now, since anything so sensational in the way of a capture had been effected; natives, a Malay or two, and even the smaller fry among whites, did not count. There was much searching of heart among far larger operators than these; many faces grew longer than they would have cared to have seen, behind the pages of the *Diamond*

Fields Advertiser that morning, and the eulogium on Wronsky's skill was endorsed with much emphasis that was not bene dictory.

Of them all no face, perhaps, looked blanker than Christian Dreyer's. Dreyer, hardened as a rule by long and successful practice into the cheerful indifference which he had foretold for Runciman, was yet subject to occasional panics; and this catastrophe was all that was wanted to confirm him in his resolution of over-night. As early as he could do so without exciting suspicion he went over to Jesse Runciman.

The way in which the young man took the warning—which had lost nothing by the hours during which Dreyer's fears had been growing—awakened in the canteen-keeper a dim suspicion that Westoby might have had some reason for his prohibition; that policy might have had more, and mere

temper less, to do with it than he had supposed. He came away with a most discomforting doubt as to whether he had materially improved the situation; whether a loss of nerve so complete might not be more dangerous than even the possibilities of ignorance.

As for Jesse Runciman, thus suddenly placed between the devil and the deep sea, he passed a few days in the agony of indecision natural to such a position, and then got a note conveyed to Westoby, informing him with the courage of absolute despair that he must see him at once; if no notice was taken of this communication within twenty-four hours he should come either to the office or to Westoby's rooms, let the risk be what it might. The communication was answered within two hours, even before the writer had found coolness to regret it. Whatever might be suspected

as to Westoby's temper on receiving it, nothing was to be gathered from his reply. It was curt, indeed, but not aggressively so, and bade Runciman be at Arkwright's house at eight o'clock that evening. If Westoby had not turned up by half-past, he must come away, and wait till another appointment could be given him.

This was towards the end of the afternoon; Jesse went at once and made certain preparations. For the last time! he told himself this, with something like an ecstasy of relief, all the while. For the time he managed to put all fear out of sight; hugging himself in thoughts of the morrow, when he should have broken free from this bondage for ever. He was almost thankful for the crisis that had worked him up to a point of courage to which no spiritual considerations had been able to bring him. To-morrow he would be safe—even more, he

would be free. Oh! the peace of the days that were coming.

That his principal should have made a rendezvous of Arkwright's house was rather a surprise; but he knew from words which Sarah had let fall, almost against her will in the fulness of her heart, that Westoby was on sufficiently intimate terms with Sam to be a grief and anxiety to her; and a more accidental seeming meeting-place could scarcely have been devised. How any opportunity for private communication was to be contrived in the house of a quite uninitiated host was a matter he left to Westoby.

He took up some Dutch tracts, which Sarah had once asked for, to give colour to a visit which he felt required some explanation. It was not absolutely unprecedented, but it was decidedly rare. Mattie was spending the evening with Mrs. Johnson—

the least desirable of her acquaintances—of the Bazaar Committee. Mattie was out more than ever, in these days; the most fashionably detached couples could scarcely see less of each other than these two did now.

It was clear, from the surprise with which Arkwright received his visitor, that no understanding had been made with him. It was cordial surprise, however.

"Yes, the missus is out," he said, to Jesse's unspeakable relief, "gone to prayer-meeting; but you'll come in and have a yarn with me, won't you?"

He opened the door of the parlour; the room was dark and unfriendly-looking, and as if he had made sufficient concession to conventionality, he continued:

"I say, old chap, suppose we sit in the kitchen? To tell the truth, I'm spending the evening there myself. It mayn't be so

fine, but it's a long sight more comfortable."

Runciman would have sat in the cellar (had there been one), with equal indifference to his surroundings; he murmured an absent assent, and to the kitchen they went accordingly. Sam established himself again in his lately-vacated chair, and resumed his interrupted pipe; he did not go through the empty form of offering his guest a luxury which he knew, with pity, he never indulged in. To show hospitality to the best of his power, he exerted himself to talk on every subject he could think of. But it was an exertion; conversation between two persons who, even when their minds are free, have scarcely an idea in common, is apt to flag after a very limited period, and in spite of Sam's best efforts silence had fallen hopelessly upon them, even before Runciman had sat for his appointed half hour.

Jesse scarcely noticed it; for him all sound was summed up in one expected sound—that of Westoby's footstep. Only, with some sort of lower consciousness, he felt the loud measured ticking of the "Castle of Chillon" clock till it became a torture. Twenty minutes past; twenty-two minutes past. He thought he heard someone at the front door, and his heart gave a bound and then stood still; the fear of Westoby, which had become the ruling passion of his life, turned him sick and cold now that the crisis seemed here. It was nothing, and the clock beat on. Twenty-five minutes past; twenty-eight: and then there was a reaction. It could not be that he was not coming! that the risk, the mortal terror, of the last few days, must be endured again for so long as his tyrant might choose.

The half-hour! Sam was fidgeting in his chair, he was evidently puzzled. Runci-

man took no heed; he sat on doggedly. Westoby must be coming, he must—he must.

Presently Sam stood up.

"I don't want to hurry you, old chap," he said, apologetically, "but I've got to be going to bring back the missus. She knows I don't like her to be coming home alone, and if I don't turn up she'll be a bit puzzled, so I don't like to run it too fine."

"Oh! of course; of course. I've given you a dreadful dose of my company, I'm afraid; but I was so—so comfortable, I scarcely noticed how time was going."

Certainly Westoby had something to show in that quarter for his two months' drill. Arkwright had thought his visitor's manner a little absent, he thought it now a little abrupt and startled, as was natural to one suddenly roused from thought. There was nothing to betray the anger, the terror,

the despair, which were making his mind a chaos.

"Our ways lie pretty near together as far as Glover's Bar, don't they?" continued Sam; "we may as well go together as separate, it's more sociable, and I shan't feel so much as if I was turning you out."

He was half-way to the door, when he stopped short.

"Oh! lor," he exclaimed, "I've just remembered. There's a letter about old Jobson's order that's bound to go by the first post to-morrow. It won't take above ten minutes, if you don't mind waiting a bit; if I put it off till I come back, I may forget again, and then there'll be ructions."

He hurried out; Jesse was left standing in the kitchen alone. He stood with his hands clenched, and all his soul possessed with a dull rage; it was the rage of the last extremity of fear, such as for a moment

gives courage for revolt. With a gesture of absolute fury he thrust his hand into an inner pocket till he felt where at the bottom lay a little box—a common snuff-box ; if his physical force had been equal to the force of his passion, he could have ground both box and diamonds into powder. He *would* be free ; if Westoby would not release him he would free himself. But so that he would be free, indeed, as little a debtor to Westoby as to the law. Stepping softly, he opened the back door ; it was locked, but the key turned easily, he could detect no noise. He went down the step into the half-yard, half-garden. The night was cloudy and dark, there was a smell of rain in the air. He crept along near the corrugated iron fence, peering into the night. At a certain spot he dropped on his knees, and began to feel about in the darkness. Against the paling the ground had lately been dug up for a border ; it was

still soft, and here only a small strip was left uncovered between the fence and a double tier of tins in which bulbs were growing—some of the bulbs Sarah had brought from Beulah.

Nothing could be safer. With a caution which had become a second nature in every detail connected with this side of his life, Runciman took his knife, to avoid, as far as possible, any stain on his hands, and began to scratch up the soil behind the tins. He opened the box. When Westoby should come to fetch his property, there should be nothing that his utmost ingenuity of malice could use to his agent's hurt. He scrambled the diamonds up into three or four little packets in the usual lead-foil; there were so many the material barely sufficed. He dropped them into the little grave; covered them up dark and deep; strewed some bits of rubbish upon the place, rose,

brushed the dust from his clothes, and went back.

Free! The sullen rage of five minutes since had given place to a sullen joy; he scarcely knew why it burned lurid, not clear. He sat down and waited, and in his heart was neither remorse nor shame, only an impatient longing for Arkwright's return, that he might leave the sooner the most hateful spot on earth.

There was not much conversation on the way. At Victoria Crescent they parted company.

"We shall have rain to-night, I fancy," said Arkwright, by way of a farewell.

"Perhaps," said Runciman, "but it has looked like this for several evenings."

"Well, good-night, old chap."

"Good-night."

And so they parted, who should meet but once more on earth; a thing as little in their

thought as it was how and where that meeting should be.

Jesse went on along Dutoitspan Road; the night was heavy and dark, almost warm suddenly, after sharp cold; all round the horizon the blackness was rent and palpitating continually with the wide, slow, silvery-blue illumination of the sheet-lightning. Yes; there would be rain.

It did not come yet, though. It did not come till many hours later; not till, at length, in both townships, most men slept. Jesse slept, and forgot for a while the sin he knew, and the meanness he had scarcely realized. Sam slept; there was nothing much for which he felt the need of oblivion. Only Sarah wakened with the noise. She lay and listened to the thunder of falling waters upon the iron roof, to the hissing rush of falling waters, filling all the air; she breathed a prayer for all the un-

sheltered of the earth, and turned again to sleep.

It rained and rained; it was as if the windows of heaven had been opened. The roads were running down as watercourses; water, ankle-deep, spread itself in ever-widening lakes in every hollow, tore in a yellow torrent down every sluit, tossing and gurgling over the rocky bed which it had bared for itself. It was a very carnival of waters. For three hours it rained; then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. An hour later the dawn was brightening in a clear sky, and Sam was on his way to the shops.

The sun rose and brightened. Sarah, going about her work, stood for a moment on the back-doorstep to feel the resurrection beauty of the new day. In the yard next theirs, a woman was standing at a wash-tub, fowls were pecking about in the sun-

shine, a little child, just able to run and talk, was toddling after them with gushes of shrill baby-laughter. Even as Sarah looked, it sat down with the sudden collapse natural to its age, and began grubbing about with unskilled fingers in the sand. The sun made a glory about its little fair head; she could not choose but linger and look a moment. The next it had scrambled up again; she saw it trotting towards its mother, holding up some wonderful treasure in its chubby hand, its tongue tripping over words which mothers only could interpret. Sarah turned back into the house, then; would there ever be someone to run to her with tales and treasures? When she next chanced to raise her eyes in passing, both woman and child were gone.

The morning passed; at mid-day Sam came home to dinner.

"Can you bring back a piece of tin this

evening, Sam?" said his wife, as they sat down. "There's a hole in the fence just behind the tins where my bulbs are (the rain has brought them on so nicely); and now the chickens are just out next door, I'm afraid of their getting into our place; the hole is quite big enough for that."

"All right," said Sam, "I'll see to it. It's their job by rights, not mine; but sooner than have 'em always poking about my premises after their blessed chickens, I'll do it myself. It may be the fashion here for folks to live half their time in their neighbours' houses and yards, but I don't hold with their prying and ferreting about mine."

He spoke with some irritation. In fact, he had not come back in the best of tempers. He had not yet quite got accustomed to the annoyances unavoidably incident to a return to a subordinate posi-

tion, and his master, an excellent, but rather fidgety and dour old Scotchman, was not the person to make the situation easier.

They were about half through dinner when there came a knock at the front door. Sam jumped up angrily.

"If it's one of those Indian fellows again," he said, "I shall just set the dogs at him. Can't a chap even have his meals in peace?"

He went out, banging the glass half-door behind him. Sarah heard the front door open, and almost simultaneously men's steps entering; then a man's voice, a sharp question from Sam, an angry laugh, a reply in the first voice. Then the door was flung open, and Sam appeared, closely followed by three strangers—white men. If these had anything to say Sam gave them no chance.

"Here's a nice go!" he exclaimed, wrath-

fully. "Here's these parties swearing that some old fool of a magistrate has sent 'em up here with a search-warrant—for *my* premises! But I'll see 'em further first, warrant or no warrant. I'll not stand——"

"Now, my man," said the spokesman, "there's no sort of use in going on like that. We've got to do it, and you've got to let us."

"Oh! have I?" retorted Sam. "We'll see about that."

"Sam, dear!"

Sarah had risen on the entrance of the detectives. With every atom of colour vanished from her face, with something in her expression which went beyond the shock and confusion natural in the circumstances, she stood beside her husband, one hand on his shoulder, the other laid imploringly on his breast; and all that her eyes said in that moment not one present could fully understand.

"Sam, dear, don't, don't make things—worse!"

He paused a moment, boiling over with indignation though he was, unwilling to shake her off or to answer her roughly. The detective, who seemed to be the leader, spoke again.

"Yes, you may as well begin with the yard," he said; and the other two passed out through the kitchen, closing the back-door behind them.

"You must both please to stay where you are," he continued, as Sam, suddenly realizing what was happening, made a start as if to follow them. And with an amazed feeling of powerlessness he stopped.

There followed a pause. Sarah had sat down again, in the place whence she had risen from her unfinished meal; instinctively she had turned her chair a little towards the kitchen door. She sat very still, her eyes

fixed in the same direction. The detective had sat down also, in a position from which he could command a view of both of them. Arkwright chose to remain standing; he stuck his hands in his pockets, and did his best to keep an appearance of that ease which was deserting him each moment, as he felt that every movement he made, every point to which he turned his eyes, was coming under the notice of the man who sat there showing no symptom of any watchfulness at all. Sam had never dreamed it could be so difficult to know where to look.

With every second he became more intensely self-conscious, more unreasonably nervous. He began to fidget, making little aimless steps hither and thither, to whistle—and broke off, against his will, after a few notes; now and then he laughed, a little angry, unnatural sound.

They could hear sounds at last from the yard; a clattering of metal; three or four heavy thuds. Sam's temper rose again; once more he made for the door, and again the detective called him back. He stood irresolute, muttering angrily, and by no means inaudibly.

Was a fellow to have his place turned upside down, and not have any say in the matter? How did he know what those chaps were up to? they might be putting things in themselves.

Sarah made a little involuntary movement. He noticed it, saw her forehead contract a little, as with some more intolerable pain, and felt ashamed of his childishness.

The noise without had ceased; a few minutes later the two detectives came back. The man on guard rose; if any sign

passed between the three, it was not discoverable.

"Finished outside?" he said. "You take charge here, then, Smith, for a bit. Johnson can go on with the house."

He turned to Sam.

"You must come with me," he said; "I have orders to search you."

Arkwright stared incredulously, then he defied any man living to lay a finger on him, and, finally, of course, went off. In about twenty minutes he came back; he flung himself into a chair, muttering snatches of mingled threats and sarcasms. Then Sarah got up from where she had been sitting—her head bowed, her face hidden in her hands, and came across to him; and because she was trembling too much to stand, she drew a chair beside his, sitting down very close to him, and took his hands in her cold ones, and began

to fondle them as she might have done to Mattie. She did not open her lips; she had not done so from the first.

Johnson passed through the room and made a sign to the other, who followed him out. In a minute or two the front door opened and shut again; the first man had left the house.

Another long pause. All this time neither husband nor wife knew in the least what had happened, whether or no anything had been found. Sam began to get confused, even, with the long strain, the ignorance of what it all meant, and the evident conviction of the officials that it did mean something. He felt as if it was even possible that they might have found what his reason told him could not be there to find. If all this was possible, anything was possible. He did not bluster any more, now; he sat nearly as still as

Sarah, very sulky, very angry, and, at bottom, getting frightened without knowing why.

It might have been half-an-hour that they had been sitting there; the clock in the kitchen had just struck two, when the front door opened again. Sam looked up instinctively with a forlorn wonder as to what was to happen next. Above the half-blind over the glass door he could see his original guard, in company with a considerably older man and with a woman.

Sam knew Chief-detective Hewitt by sight, and not even conscious innocence could save his nerves—severely tried with an hour and a half of mystery and annoyance—a certain shock. In fact, by this time he was beginning to lose his head dangerously.

Johnson was searching in the bedroom; he came to the door, spoke a little with

Hewitt, and went back again. The woman, at a sign from the chief, went into the parlour; the other two came on into the dining-room. Smith, still on guard, stood up when they came in; the others instinctively did the same. There was a sense that the crisis had come.

The first thing the new-comer did was to order Mrs. Arkwright into the parlour, where the female searcher was waiting. He spoke in a voice of the merest officialism; the suggestion of his personality was rather kindly than otherwise; but it was little the poor girl perceived it. Her fortitude gave way; she burst into tears, and sank down again on the chair, incapable, for a moment, of obeying. The next, the outburst of Sam's indignation brought her to herself.

"Don't—don't, dear," she sobbed. "Oh! sir, don't take any heed of what he says. I'm—I'm going."

And she went out, weeping bitterly. Hewitt watched her into the room; then he turned to Arkwright.

By this time Sam was thoroughly frightened. The common sense which his prejudice against the Department could not quite obscure, told him that such extreme measures would never have been taken without some very serious justification. Yet the shock was tremendous when the chief detective, having cautioned him in due form, went on:

"These were found buried in your yard, in the border against the left-hand fence. Do you know anything about them?"

Sam stared at the four little packets lying, half-opened, in the detective's palm. He turned hot and cold; every horrible story of miscarriage of justice he had ever heard seemed to flash into his mind in that

one instant of time. He lost his head completely.

"It's some beastly trick!" he burst out, desperately; "or—or they must have been left by the party that had the house before." At the same moment he remembered that he himself had made that particular border barely six weeks ago. "I mean——" he stammered, broke off, and ended with the sullenness of despair: "I don't know anything about them."

After that he resigned himself, with an angry hopeless resignation. He heard that he was arrested, with comparative indifference; there was nothing else to be expected now. He sat down and closed his eyes; when he opened them again it was on the entrance of his wife.

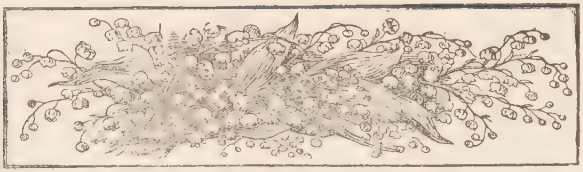
Sarah also was under arrest; but it was not this that had put the strange new misery into her face. That had been born at the

moment when she in her turn had been shown the diamonds. She had kept her presence of mind far better than Sam, merely denying any knowledge of them, but it was then that the look of the heart-stricken had come into her eyes—her eyes that had dried suddenly.

It never left them, nor was it ever turned away from Sam. He was aware of it all through the horrible silent drive to the police-station; it was the last thing he saw when, at length, they were led away in opposite directions. He could not read its language, yet it haunted him strangely, even among many more urgent anxieties, through the long slow dragging of the remainder of the day—through the restless night. He could not hear the meaning, moaned out in words upon her knees.

"Oh! Sam, Sam! Why must it have

taken all this to make me know I had begun to love you? and why must I have begun to love you only to know that you are a thief?"



CHAPTER XXXII.

"HAVE you heard the news, Jesse?" In her excitement, Mattie spoke more naturally and cordially than she had done for weeks. "Mrs. Johnson was here this afternoon and she told me; it's making such a talk all over Kimberley, she says. It's Mr. Arkwright; he's in such a dreadful scrape. Fancy! You know that rain we had, night before last? Well, yesterday morning the people next door found a couple of diamonds in their yard—big ones—and they took them to the police-station right off, and the police came up to see the place, and it looked just as if they must have been

washed out of Mr. Arkwright's yard—there was a hole in the fence, and Mrs. Johnson says you could see the marks quite plain where the earth had been washed down; and they sent and had this place searched, and they found, oh! a most awful lot of diamonds—hundreds of pounds worth, Mrs. Johnson says; but we shall see all that in the paper to-morrow, because he was had up before the magistrate this morning, yes, and Sarah, too—fancy! poor Sarah. But the magistrate said there was no evidence against her (I should think not, indeed!) so he discharged her; but Mr. Arkwright was committed for trial to the Special Court, and I don't know quite when that sits next, but Mrs. Johnson heard it would be in about ten days or a fortnight; and isn't it awful? Poor Sarah! I must go up and see her first thing to-morrow. Why, Jesse, what's the matter?"

He stood holding on to the edge of the table with both hands, and even so she could see how he was trembling. Suddenly he turned and took a step or two.

"My hat," he said, in a bewildered sort of way; "where is my hat? I must go."

"What? is it Sarah you're going to see? It won't be any kindness to go to-night. Poor thing! most likely she's in bed by now; I'm sure I hope so, after all she's gone through. And, anyhow, you'll not have time before your class, not even if you miss your tea."

He stared at her.

"What are you talking about?" he said. "My class? What o'clock is it?"

He spoke in the same bewildered way as before.

"Oh! dear me," she said, sharply; "one is really afraid to tell you anything, you put yourself in such a state directly.

Where's the use? It isn't likely you're half as sorry as I am, that have known her pretty near as long as I've known anything, but you don't see me going on like that!"

"You!" he cried, with a sudden fierceness. "You haven't any heart at all; you're just glad to have something to talk about; you'd comfort yourself for her funeral, if you could have the fussing over it! You! you! Oh! go away; can't you see you're driving me mad?"

"Well! I'm sure," retorted Mattie, in much indignation. "I'm going—I suppose you know tea is ready; you can have it when you choose to come for it."

"That's the sort of thing he's always saying to me now," she muttered, as she went down the passage. "I don't know what's come over him. Perhaps Sarah's right, and he really is ill; but what can I do? he only flies out at me if I ask. If

he won't take proper food or get himself proper clothes, this weather, he must expect to be ill. Well! I shan't wait for him."

But though she sat down to the table somewhat defiantly and helped herself, the meal was rather a poor pretence. Mattie was not so heartless as he had said, though it is true, her heart was not particularly troubled about him. Not much even when it became clear that he did not mean to join her at all, for she heard him leave the house.

"Oh! well, he has remembered his class," she thought. "He is starting very early for that, though."

But he had not gone to his class; half blind and dazed, actually stumbling now and then as he went, he was making his way to Dreyer's canteen.

Dreyer was sitting in the room behind the bar, comfortably studying a dirty copy of the *Police News*, when Jesse came in; the

first glance was enough to make him throw down the sheet, and to drive away his lately recovered expression of general content.

"*Allemagtig!*" he exclaimed, pushing back his chair, "what has happened? You ought not to be coming here now, and looking like this. Did anyone see you?"

It chanced that no one had, but Jesse cared as little as he knew.

"Tell me it isn't true!" he gasped. "You haven't heard anything. It's all those old women's lies. Arkwright—it isn't possible—*Arkwright*——;" he shuddered from head to foot.

"Ach! is that all?" said Dreyer, with immense relief. "Yes—*de arme kerel*—they've got him; sure enough. All that about so great quantity of stuff will be just talk, of course; how can he get it together in the time—a new hand, and no capital?

No; it will just have been three or four stones—not worth the risk, poor chap."

But Jesse had heard nothing beyond the first words.

"Then it's all over," he said, with a sudden desperate sort of calm. "And I'm glad. It will be better than this. Where ought I to go? To the police-station? To the Resident Magistrate?"

He pressed his hand to his head.

"It aches so," he said, "and seems to be going round. I shan't be able to tell it all clear; but they will understand. They won't think me mad, will they? or even if they do——"

Dreyer had sat staring at him with a mixture of fear and perplexity which bordered on the ludicrous.

"I don't know what they'll think," he said, resignedly, "whoever they may be. But I'm blest if *I* don't think you're off your

head. Whatever are you talking about? It's nothing to do with any of us. I never knew the fellow was in the trade at all; likely he never was, not rightly to say so—it will just have been a bit of amateur business, you'll see. What in all the world has it to do with you?"

"With me?" echoed Jesse, still with that startling vague-eyed calm. "Why, it *is* me. I put the things there myself, Tuesday night."

For the first moment Dreyer really did think that the young man's brain had given way. The next, his guilty conscience gave him, in a flash, an only too clear account of the situation and of his own responsibility for it. He turned a sickly white and began pouring out invocations, in Dutch, of all the powers of heaven.

"All the Baas' stuff!" he groaned, in the same language; the emergency was

quite beyond English; "and gone like that!"

This which was naturally to the canteen-keeper the most important part of the case had not, as yet, to do him justice, occurred to Jesse. Even now it did not seem to affect him; probably his mind was not clear enough to take it in; he was, indeed, frightfully overwrought. Now he only stared at Dreyer as he had stared at Mattie.

"Good-bye," he said, putting out his hand in an aimless sort of way. "I'm going to give myself up. You'll see all about it in the paper to-morrow. She said so."

Then he put out both hands, and staggered a little, and Dreyer got him down into a chair.

"For the love of heaven, Mr. Runciman," he pleaded, "don't go and do anything in a hurry. See, we're both of us in the worst sort of hole—I know that;

but don't you go doing anything in a hurry as might make things worse. Have a bit of patience," he went on, soothingly, laying his hand on the young man's arm, "and we'll find some way out of the mess for you and me, and the other chap too. (Though I'm blest if I know what it can be," he added, mentally.) "See, I'm sorry to have got you into such a scrape, it is true I am" (and so he was, neither altogether selfishly nor unselfishly). "I'm sorry I ever had any hand in this job from the first. I don't hold with the Baas' sort of bullying. If I'd known how you would feel about things, I don't know but what I'd have stood out of it altogether; I don't know but what I would."

He was not at all clever enough to have calculated on the effect of this address; he simply felt that he had no authority he could assert, and yet that his confederate must be

stopped at any price. But he could have chosen no wiser line of action. It was weeks since anyone—who knew—had spoken to Jesse with even decent kindness; now even this much gentleness was too much for him. He broke into a terrible fit of crying, and Dreyer felt, instinctively, that the worst was over. Presently, however, he began to fear he might be heard; now that the relief had come the young man seemed absolutely incapable of checking his sobs. Dreyer looked longingly at the chiffonier.

"He told me not," he muttered; "but it's in for a penny in for a pound, so far as that goes, now; I can't put my foot in it much worse than I've done already. I don't believe it can hurt, for once. He can't go to his prayer-meeting like this, and I daren't let him miss it."

He took courage from despair; in a minute or two he was holding to Runciman's

lips a mixture whose strength he had proportioned, with some misgivings, to the patient's incapacity, and Jesse, scarcely conscious, drank it down. The result seemed to justify Dreyer in his disobedience; in half a minute the worst of the paroxysm was over, Jesse looked up and made an effort to pull himself together.

"That's right," said Dreyer, "now we can look at things a little better. You've no call to worry yourself like this. Bless you! it's nothing to be remanded to the Special Court. Lots of times the cases don't come on after all, and if they do that's not to say he'll be convicted. The magistrates don't dare do too much discharging themselves, but as often as not the chaps they send up are acquitted. You'll see that's how it'll be with him."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it," said Dreyer, auda-

ciously. "Any fool must see it's an impossible charge, on the face of it; he couldn't have done it, not with the best will in the world. No; you'll see it'll just be smuggled over. Likely he'll have to leave Kimberley, but there's no great harm in that. And for the rest you may make your mind easy; there's no one has any notion about you, after all. It was all that ass Heinemann. Only this morning he comes smirking up to me, says he must have been a bit drunk that night. A bit! he must have been as drunk as an owl—had seen and spoken to the very chap since, and it wasn't Wronsky at all."

"Then I did it all for nothing," said Jesse, despondently rather than bitterly.

"You couldn't have known; no one could have counted on such beastly luck as that. And I tell you, you haven't done any great harm yet anyhow."

Emboldened by success he persuaded Jesse to finish his dose, under the pretence of medicine, made him bathe his eyes as best he could, and sent him off. Left alone he sank back into his chair and groaned.

"Nothing much yet!" he echoed himself, bitterly. "And the Baas to be reckoned with!"

Yet heavy though that reckoning was likely to be, he felt he could almost have welcomed the worst of Westoby's wrath to have had the benefit of his direction. But just at this crisis he was away. Before daybreak on the morning of that fatal Wednesday, he had started for Klerksdorp, to see after the affairs of a branch of his business in that village; it was the pressure of work consequent on his coming absence that had prevented his keeping his appointment with Jesse. Dreyer knew nothing of the probable date of his return. He could only

hope that he had pacified Runciman sufficiently to keep him quiet at least till the result of the trial should be known. After that he could foresee nothing.

He saw no more of the young minister during the next fortnight. Jesse, in fact, was playing much the same waiting game as Dreyer himself. Whether or not he was convinced at heart by the canteen-keeper's hopeful suggestions, he acted as though he were —· or rather refrained from acting. Having failed to do the right thing at once he found it no easier when it came to second thoughts. Morning after morning he rose—there was little question of sleeping in these days—trying to persuade himself that before the day was out he should hear that the affair had been somehow "smuggled over." And when hopefulness failed him, as it failed him constantly, or when his misery of conscience became too great to be borne, he

had learned a way of sustaining hope and of forgetting conscience, which Dreyer was as far from guessing as he had been from anticipating it.

Demoralized though he had become, it is still probable that even under tolerably severe stress of temptation Jesse would not, in full consciousness, have broken his pledge. But when he realized, the next morning, that without his will, so to say, he had broken it anyhow, all following steps were comparatively easy. The memory of the almost magical effect of Dreyer's potion came back to him with the first attack of misery, and he scarcely attempted resistance. Unfortunately he had the means at hand. A bottle of French brandy, bought once for some case of sickness among his flock, was under lock and key in his study. He took to that. It must be owned that he was tolerably careful; but a week sufficed to

reduce him to a dependence on this remedy, which he by no means realized himself. And, of course, it was not a taste that remained stationary.

But of all this Dreyer suspected nothing. When, on the night after the trial, it did come upon him, it was as a revelation. He could think of little else as he sat the long hours through, too much dispirited even to drink, listening to sounds dying out one by one, till the midnight stillness settled down upon everything, till not even the bark of a dog was heard any more, nor the rattle of the most belated cart.

It was the small hours of the morning ; he dropped asleep in his chair at times, but anxiety would not allow him any long space of slumber. He woke continually, with the feeling that his fear had come upon him—the fear of the dawn. Then he would rise and go to the window, and peer cautiously

through the side of the thick cretonne curtain, to see if the sky paled. But it was still all blackness of darkness—the thick darkness before day — when, far away at first but taken up nearer and nearer, the dogs began to bark again, and steadily through the fitful clamour, from the road towards the border, came the measured beating of a horse's hoofs. A trooper in the Mounted Police, perhaps, or a doctor returning from some outlying farm. The half-roused dogs had barked themselves into silence, now; the hoof-beats came nearer, were passing, stopped, and two or three strokes as from a whip-handle came at the side-door.

There was only one man that it could be, and little as Dreyer desired to see him he dared not refuse to answer the summons. He brought no light to the door; it was only as a black mass that he discerned Westoby, as he threw himself from his

horse, and with a gesture of some weariness stepped into the passage. There it was darker still; only a strip of light shone from under the closed door of the room Dreyer had just left.

"I didn't know you were back," said the canteen-keeper; his voice trembled a little. "Has anything happened?"

"That's what I've been riding fifteen hours on end to find out," said Westoby. "How do you come to be up still?"

There was a certain suspicion in his tone, yet he suspected nothing definite; only just then all life seemed beset by causes for suspicion.

"I scarcely expected to make you hear," he continued, without waiting for an answer. "If you had not come at once I should have gone on, and chanced it till morning, though a deal less than five hours may make all the difference at times. But

I hope matters ain't come to that pass yet?"

His tone put a question.

"No; oh! bless you, no," muttered Dreyer. The darkness might have been a blaze of light for all the concealment it afforded to his disquietude. "Nor likely to."

"You seem in a blessed funk if that's so," returned Westoby, and Dreyer felt his eyes in his voice. He leaned his back against the door, stretching out his legs in front of him; he was weary, indeed, yet it was the anxiety rather than the exertion of those fifteen hours that was telling upon him.

"I stopped at a road-side house for tiffin, just before noon," he said, "and there I stumbled on a paragraph in a ten days' old *Friend of the Free State*, that brought me along right off. I reckon you know what

it was. Let's have the yarn straight, will you?"

"There's not much of it. They found stuff buried in Arkwright's garden, and run him in; and to-day he got three years. They let him off easy because of his previous good character."

"And the interesting revelations they said were expected?"

"Oh! that——; that will be just newspaper rot."

Westoby flicked his riding-whip impatiently against the wainscot.

"Why can't you tell me the truth, you fool, when you know I can get it from anyone?"

"Well, 'twasn't likely, by the quantity, he'd got the stuff together himself, nor it didn't seem likely it could have come there so on purpose like without his knowing about it, anyway; and being as you had

gone out of your way to get so hand and glove with him, they thought it was you, and I reckon they hoped he'd split."

Westoby was silent a moment, and to Dreyer every moment was a respite.

"When was this stuff found?" he asked.

"On the afternoon of the fourth."

"I see," said Westoby.

Dreyer could hardly believe that there was no more to come, yet of fury in that respect no more came. Suddenly Westoby drew himself up.

"How have you kept that young fool quiet?" he asked.

"Oh! I—I managed somehow."

His knees were trembling under him.

"Was he in court to-day?"

"No, he was sick; his head was so sore, he could not get up till quite late this afternoon."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No."

But even as he spoke he could not restrain the nervous sidling movement by which he would have masked the room-door.

"Liar!" said Westoby.

He made one stride and flung open the door. The atmosphere was stifling with spirits, paraffin, and general closeness. A lamp was burning on the chiffonier; in the centre of the room, head and arms fallen prone upon the table before him, sat Jesse Runciman, in the heavy sleep of intoxication.

Westoby gave Dreyer a look which turned the canteen-keeper sick: it was such as the victim might see on the face of the murderer, the last thing he sees on earth. He lifted his whip and struck out once with the butt end, blindly; Dreyer stepped back

just in time to escape the full force of the blow, but the arm, instinctively raised, which caught it fell powerless by his side. It was not repeated. From the corner to which he had crept he was witness of a struggle with passion almost as terrible as unbridled rage. For a few moments the strong man seemed to shake under it; then he had his devil in hand again.

He went up to Runciman and shook him by the shoulder. The young man had so far slept off the effects of drink, that under that terrible grip he woke enough to open his eyes in a moment's bewildered stare. Westoby turned to Dreyer, who still stood cowering at the furthest possible distance.

"He is coming round," he said, briefly. "Go and get something to bring him to enough to get home before daybreak."

Dreyer hurried off; Westoby unloosed Runciman's collar with no gentle hand, and dashed some water over his head and face, and with two or three sobbing sighs, he began to come back to some dull perception of unfathomable misery and shame. But with all that could be done, it was fully half-an-hour before he was sufficiently recovered to be able to leave; a distant cock was already saluting the yet unborn day. Westoby in his turn went to the window and looked out. All was still and lonely; a dying moon was fading wanly in a sky pallid as yet with the death of night rather than with the birth of morn.

"It seems clear," he muttered. "Now," he went on, turning sharply to Jesse, "you be off; go right home, and be thankful I got here in time."

Beyond the first feeble mutterings of returning consciousness, Jesse had not

hitherto spoken a word; now he broke out with a sort of cry.

"I can't go home. How can I? What am I to say?"

"Am *I* to make up a story for you?" said Westoby, bitterly. "Find out for yourself what to say; I reckon you know how as well as I do by now. It ain't the first time, is it?"

Jesse turned to go.

"You will meet me at the heaps, back of the cemetery, at four o'clock this afternoon. Do you hear, and understand?" he added, roughly, laying his hand on the young man's arm.

"Yes," said Jesse, sullenly. He did not promise obedience; it was scarcely necessary.

Westoby opened the house door for him; Dreyer scared and cowed durst make no move. When it was closed

and locked behind the young man, Westoby came back into the room, and like the king of old, the very fashion of his countenance was changed. He turned upon Dreyer.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MONTH had passed since the prison gates had closed upon Samuel Arkwright, and by the world at large, he and his case had long since been forgotten. For the world at large, those gates are but a stone's throw further from Lethe, than are the gates of the grave ; a month is all too long a time to fill with the memory of the captive or of the dead.

But Samuel Arkwright's wife, standing at the door of Runciman's house waiting for her knock to be answered, was musing of the meaninglessness of all measures of time ; so age-like did that month lie behind

her, yet so inappreciable a fraction of the time he must live through still.

Her heart was full to overflowing of an infinite pity for him, of yearning over him, yet it was not love, or at least, only such as pity would have waked in her, for the weakest and the worst. But till his day of trouble, she had scarcely given him so much as this ; she may well have taken it—so unlearned was she in the ways of love—for more and other than it was.

The night was heavy and close, there was thunder in the air. Even as Jesse Runciman opened the door, a swift blue javelin of lightning lit up the dark behind her ; a far faint muttering ended the pause before she actually entered the house.

"Yes, I knew Mattie was at the river," she said, in answer to a statement by which he faintly hoped to save himself; "but if you are not very busy, Mr.

Runciman, I should so like to speak to you."

He bent his head in silence. It was dark in the passage, he could allow himself, for a moment, the look of wild fear of the coming torture, which prudence, not pride, forbade him in the light. Even in a look, now, there was something of the relief of a cry. The next minute he had brought a lamp into the little parlour and had schooled his face.

Sarah sat down by the table; her hands were clasped on her lap beneath the long cloak, which, together with her plain dark bonnet, gave her something of a conventual appearance. Yet the face which she turned to his, was not the face of a nun—far less so than it had been at Marston. Many things had come into it since then, things many and strange, and of which she could give no clear account to herself, and there

was more to come. The face of a saint it would be always, the face of a nun never again.

"It is so seldom I can see you alone now, Mr. Runciman," she began; "I think never once since this trouble happened. And there are things one can't well say before others—not even before my Mattie; I shouldn't feel it to be doing right by him, by my husband. But I may say them to you—to a minister. I ought. And the time is getting short. They are going to send some——" she paused a moment, then went on, low but firmly, "some of the convicts down to Cape Town, next Thursday, and Sam is to be one."

She spoke with lowered eyes; when she raised them, as she ended, his face startled her for a moment out of the consideration of her own troubles. They never clung so closely about her heart as to stifle thought for those of others.

"You look very ill," she said. "You should spare yourself more, even for the sake of those for whom you labour."

"I am not sick," he said, with a touch of the irritability Mattie had noticed in him. Then he wondered why he had repudiated a suggestion which was his best defence. "That is to say, my head aches," he added. "There is nothing much in that; it mostly aches now-a-days." He forced a sufficiently ghastly smile

"I was afraid it did," she said, a little anxiously. "I know how gladly you will both spend and be spent in the work of the ministry. But, indeed, I feel it would be selfish in me to put more upon you than you have already, only that it may be the salvation of a soul." All at once she covered her face with her hands.

"Oh! Mr. Runciman," she broke out, "I am very unhappy."

"The Lord comfort you, sister," he said, faintly.

"God bless you for your sympathy," she answered, gratefully. "I wouldn't mind the disgrace—no, I ought not to say that; I should. It is part of the punishment, one ought to mind it. But if I could see that all this was being blest to his soul, I could bear it—oh! I could almost welcome it. But to feel that he is refusing the chastening of the Lord, that he is hardening his heart, justifying himself even now——!"

"Human justice miscarries sometimes, sister." He forced the words through his white lips. "What if he were innocent?"

"Ah! brother," she said, with a keener pang of pain, "you mean it well, but don't *you* begin to prophesy smooth things unto me. Innocent? yes, they tell me he couldn't have done it himself—I don't know how that may be—but: 'When thou sawest a thief

then thou consentedst with him,' how can I forget that? And he never felt it to be sin, he never did, and till he does how can all the suffering in the world cleanse his stain? My heart is breaking for his soul's sake, and I can do nothing—I have no power with him any more—the Lord deliver me from blood-guiltiness when He maketh inquisition, for surely at my hands He will require my husband's soul!"

She spoke with a passion such as no anguish short of spiritual could have stirred in her.

"That is why I came to you, brother. *I* was looking for great things to do—oh! the fancies I used to have at Marston!—and the work that lay to my hand I neglected, and I am punished. But you—the Lord found you faithful in that which was least, and He has given you much. You have power over souls; Sam's must

not be lost because I have failed. Go to him, plead with him, show him his sin; and may the word of the Lord in your mouth be as a fire, keener than any two-edged sword—oh! it will hurt him, it will hurt, but don't spare for that. He will bless you for it some day, the day when you stand before the throne and say: 'Behold me and the children whom Thou hast given me.'"

He had pushed back his chair at the word which bade him go; he sat staring at her with such eyes of bewildered horror as gaze upon sudden death. She did not see, for hers were drowned in tears.

"They will allow it," she went on. "Everyone has been so kind to me, all along—done all they could for me; and you a minister. Oh! brother, you will go?"

"God forbid!"

The ejaculation broke from him almost against his will, and though he did actually

voice the syllables it was in a tone so low and hoarse it scarcely needed the roar of the nearing storm to drown it. The words had scarcely died upon his lips before the fear that she had heard them mastered every other fear. She had not; she was asking him to fix a day for his visit. He appointed the following Tuesday—one day did as well to name as another when he had no intention of going at all. Her tearful eyes found a faint gleam wherewith to thank him.

"The Lord reward you, brother," she sobbed.

And Jesse, sick with fear and shame to his heart's core, did not doubt of his reward.

Her face hidden in her hands, Sarah sat and silently wept her troubled heart into stillness. Jesse sat no less motionless; the pain in his temples, and, as it were about the roots of his brain throbbed and burned till it seemed beyond what could be borne and

consciousness retained; yet not for one moment did he lose the power of realizing a mental agony to which even the physical suffering was but as an harmonious background. There was no sound in all the room except the ever-nearing storm. Presently Sarah raised her head. Her tears had ceased to flow, and she looked more like herself.

"Will you pray with me, brother, before I go? for me and for him. Oh! the comfort of being able to ask that! I have wrestled so long alone, but now—'if two of you shall agree together concerning anything that ye ask'—Surely the blessing will come now.

He had been sitting with his hand over his eyes; he bent his head without removing them. At the sign she sank on her knees and did not see the look on the face momentarily uncovered as he stood up—the

look of a lost soul. He knelt down; he would go through with it now, he must. But he had miscalculated his nerve. He strove for speech, it would not come; the seconds of silence seemed lengthening out to hours. He pressed his hands over his eyes, and horrible many-coloured flames lit up the darkness, and wheeled and swam slowly like live things, and an urgent inarticulate humming and whirring in his ears seemed to proceed from these. His heart now leaped convulsively, and again stood still; his life seemed to be sinking down through unfathomable vacuum into annihilation. Through the void, and the dizziness, and the blackness, he yet at last forced some word of invocation.

"Oh! Lord," he said; and again, "Oh! Lord——"

And then the effort of speech let loose the pent-up hysteria. With a smothered

sound, half gasp, half cry, he somehow struggled to his feet and staggered a few paces to the couch where he sank down.

"No!" he panted, "I——I can't! I didn't mean——I——I'll tell everything——only spare me a little—not like this—not to go down quick into hell!"

He was shaken from head to foot with a convulsive shivering, his breath came in sobbing gasps, but he found no tears such as had come to his relief in the canteen; there was no place for them in the wild terror that possessed him. Between conscience and the weakness of failing health he did honestly think that that mortal faintness had meant death.

He closed his eyes again for a moment, though he was feeling better already; when he opened them it was to see Sarah bending over him, asking anxiously what had happened?

He passed his hand across his brow.

"I thought I was dying," he said, in a confused, dreamy sort of way. Then: "What have I said?" he asked, with a sudden terror, but he was not asking her. "Well!" he continued with a fresh access of horror-stricken agitation, "I couldn't help it. He must kill me, now, if he likes, but I couldn't! It was tempting the Lord—and I couldn't, I couldn't die like that, with a blasphemy—— A little time for repentance; I must have that; oh! it can't be too late!"

His eyes, dilated with terror, were fixed almost unconsciously on the face of the woman before him, as if he would wrest an answer of mercy by main force. All at once the look changed; as though drawn by some irresistible power he rose suddenly, though every limb was trembling, and stared towards the door. On the threshold stood Thomas Westoby.

A peal of thunder had drowned both his knock and the sound of his entrance. Now he took a step or two forward into the room. He seemed to have been caught by the storm unawares, for his clothes, unprotected by any overcoat, were sodden with wet, as was also the soft, shapeless felt hat which he did not trouble himself to remove; drops hung on his thick grizzled beard, and glistened even on his shaggy eyebrows, contracted almost to meeting in a heavy frown. His hands were fiercely clenched, but he was making a violent effort to keep his temper.

"Now then, young man," he said, "perhaps you'll tell me what's all this I've been hearing about you?" All at once he seemed to become aware of Mrs. Arkwright. "Oh! I didn't see you'd got company," he said, as though it had not been the news of her visit, heard by chance on his rounds,

which alone had brought him. "Beg pardon, ma'am, but I've got a bit of business with this reverend gent as must be settled right off between us two. Maybe you'd be so obliging as to leave us to it."

In mere bewilderment Sarah made a step as if to comply; Jesse sprang forward and caught her by the arm.

"Don't go!" he implored; "for the love of heaven don't leave me! He'll kill me; he'll kill me body and soul."

Westoby ground his heel upon the floor in a fury of impatience.

"Kill you! you whining, sneaking, white-livered cur," he exclaimed. "Do you take me for quite a fool? Kill you! here and now? Hadn't I better go and fetch a policeman, right away, and ask him to see it done?" Then with a sudden change from sarcasm to ferocity: "Now then, stir your stumps; you've got legs, I suppose, as well

as her ; if she won't go you can come ; we'll have this out somewhere else. I'm not particular whether it's here or there."

He flung open the door again, and motioned Jesse out.

"Now then!" he repeated, sternly, but with already controlled impatience.

Jesse dropped his hold of Sarah's arm. She turned a little, took his burning hand in one of hers and laid the other on his shoulder. But it was Westoby who held her gaze, whom her gaze held.

"The Lord rebuke thee, Satan," she said. "Don't go, brother."

She gave herself no practical explanation of the situation ; she cared for none. The spiritual core of it was all with which she was concerned. A soul hung between heaven and hell ; was this the moment to ask exactly how it came to be there? Her eyes, her face were transfigured as they had

scarcely been since her wedding-day. Westoby saw that light—the light which had been there when, for the first time, he had seen her face turned towards him on the ship—understood it, and cursed it in his heart. He gathered up his forces. Suddenly he changed his tone.

"Here's a lot of high-falutin' nonsense about a little matter of business," he exclaimed, with a harsh laugh. "That's what it is to have the women to do with. Come on; you must see for yourself that there's nothing to be done here. And this thing's bound to be settled; you don't need for me to tell you that. D—— you," he ended, with a relapse into uncontrollable exasperation, "you ain't afraid for your precious life still?"

"Don't go, brother, as you value the life of your soul."

"His soul," sneered Westoby. If the

thing must needs be fought out on these lines, he was not unequal to the occasion. "It's a bit late in the day to begin to bother about that, ain't it, my lad? I reckon there ain't much damage left to be done in that quarter. If that's all that's keeping you, you're a fool for your pains. You'd best make the neatest job you can still of this world, because you've settled your chances in the next, young man, take my word for it."

Jesse flung himself into the nearest chair; with his face hidden on the arm thrown across the chair-back he motioned Sarah away with the other hand.

"Go!" he cried; "go and leave me. If he's the devil himself—and I believe he is—he's speaking the truth this time. I know it is too late; I knew it all along."

"Truth!" echoed Sarah. "No. The blackest of lies."

Jesse raised his head and looked round;

his whole face was changed, hardened into a sullen despair.

"You don't know," he began, with a sort of anger.

"Nor ain't going to," interposed Westoby, suggestively.

"No, you're not going to," he went on, recklessly. "If you did, you wouldn't talk like that. Go away; you only make things worse. It's not for me. Will you leave me?"

"No."

Westoby laughed, such a laugh as might make the blood boil in the veins of the coldest. He did not really hope to effect anything practical thereby, but his hatred absolutely required that much vent. It did not sting the most passing flush of colour to her cheek. Perhaps she had scarcely heard. She was kneeling now by Jesse's side.

"Go away," he repeated, yet was the iteration rather hopeless than sullen. "It's no use, I tell you. I sold myself to him and I'm his. I'm his, body and soul."

"Right you are, my boy," said Westoby, with a grim cheerfulness.

"Listen, brother," she said, gently. "I cannot contend with this man; the Lord has not given me the gift of speech. But as long as I'm here you shall not be his. And I shall stay. As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. I will not leave this house, except—you go with me."

Westoby broke out with an oath. He would have been glad to recall it the next moment, as testifying too plainly to the strength of her position; but for once he had been taken by surprise.

She gave as little heed to the oath as to the laughter. Still upon her knees, her

pleading hands were on Jesse's arm; her pleading eyes, steady with a faith mighty to kindle faith, yearning with such love as begets hope were fixed on his face, stood between him and the fascination of the enemy's.

"Brother," she said, softly, and again, "brother!"

He looked up for a moment, his face lost nothing of its gloom, yet something of the hardness died out of it. He sighed; a hopeless little sound in itself, yet she blessed it. She stood up and took his hand, and he did not draw it away.

"Brother!" she said; "won't you come home with me?"

Westoby laughed again.

"Well! it takes one of your saints for that! What? you can't see enough of him here, can't you? not even with the missus away! Ay, take him home with you—

sister! Dear Sam 'll never know; only mind he's back by the house, bright and early, and dear Mattie need never be the wiser either!"

She was standing confronting him then. For a moment a shadow of disgust trembled on the pale face untinted by any blush. Then even that passed.

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Westoby," she said, quietly.

He looked her back straight in the eyes —and was silent. The same instant she turned.

"Come, brother," she said.

She gave a little upward pressure to the hand she held; half mechanically he stood up, his hand still in hers like a child's. They made a step towards the open door; another. Then, with one backward stride, Westoby stood again upon the threshold. Jesse stopped and shrank.

"You fool!" said Westoby, and there was a strange new tone in his voice. "Do you think I don't know when I'm beaten? She's won, and I wish her joy of you; to my mind, you're as little worth saving—if saved you be—as you were worth damning, but that's not my affair. But if I kept my hands off you before, you needn't put yourself in a funk on that score now. *I'm* no mongrel nigger, not to know how to take a licking properly."

He made a half-sarcastic motion of salute towards Sarah as he stood; then the door of the room crashed behind him, next the door of the house. Into the rain and the night he had passed out of his victim's outward life for ever.

The thunder moaned in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was still raining hard when Westoby left the house, though the storm was passing over. With his hat pulled down over his brows and his head bent, he took his way, through the pitchy darkness, along the road which was now a river. In two or three minutes he had come to the point where the street in which the Runcimans lived, joined the main road. A turn to the right would have led him down to Dutoitspan and Dreyer's canteen; perhaps it was more than could be expected of human nature that, though he remembered this, Westoby should go a good mile out of his way, at a

time when hours had became precious, for the sake of the person whom, chiefly, he had to thank for the present catastrophe. At any rate, he did take the turn to the left, and began to breast the hill towards Kimberley.

He knew the game was up, knew that Jesse's actual confession was now merely a question of a few minutes, sooner or later. A little tenderness, a little patient firmness, and everything would be out. It was quite likely that he would repent of that confession next day, when he would have to face the consequences in all their miserable details. This might possibly be some mental satisfaction to Westoby, who certainly did sincerely hope that Jesse might find his punishment to be everything that his own imagination, or that of his late master, could suggest. But it could not make any practical difference to the situa-

tion. Even if Runciman's sense of honour should extend to omitting any mention of his principal in his story (a thing which that principal not unjustifiably thought very doubtful), there could be no doubt whatever, that the least ingenious lawyer could get the whole matter from him in five minutes' questioning. It remained therefore, now, only to consider how best to provide for his own safety.

As he strode along through the streaming blackness, he tried hard to keep himself sufficiently calm to go over in his mind plans which were certainly not now made for the first time. But at first, even *his* will was not equal to the effort. The rage that possessed him would not be ignored. Presently he realized this, and, realizing it, deliberately allowed himself to work off his temper so far as circumstances would permit. He left the road and plunged into

the bordering veld. He stumbled on for some distance—and the difficulty of walking was already some relief—and at last he cast himself down upon the sodden ground. Then he gave himself up. He sat and fairly let his passion tear him, let every limb work with it, every distorted feature; exhausted himself in every choking frenzied imprecation that his imagination could supply. In the extremely improbable event of anyone being within ear-shot, it did not greatly matter now.

The plan answered perfectly. In about fifteen minutes he had sworn and raged himself into composure. His mind was clear now; he did not try to force it back at once into a track beset with irritations, but allowed it to concentrate itself on the question of how to get back to the road. He had gone farther than he knew, and had only a general idea of his bearings,

but at last he struck the road at a point a little below the top of the hill. By that time he was fairly himself again.

He had just got abreast of the Half-way House; light streamed out through the open doors of the bar; the little space of ground and wall and gum-tree, which it revealed, were all glistening with wet. As Westoby passed across the utmost limit of the light, a native, who had been sitting huddled up disconsolately enough under such shelter as a mimosa-bush on the edge of the road afforded, rose and followed him. The sound of paddling unshod feet in a shuffling trot, made Westoby stop and turn. Before he could utter either enquiry or abuse a twist of paper was thrust into his hand, and without a word the messenger had scuttled back into the darkness. He could hear the steps dying away in the direction of Beaconsfield.

Westoby stood a moment; a certain foreboding was upon him. He tried to identify the native in his mind, but the darkness, the swiftness, the silence, in which the transaction had passed, baffled him. He untwisted the paper in his hand, smoothing it out in his palm; then he struck a light and tried to decipher the writing, but the little blue flame went out in the rain with a hiss and a splutter. He strode on a little more quickly than before; he was getting into Kimberley now, but the weather had cleared the roads of passengers; when he stopped again under a street-lamp near the Hospital, it was in a perfect solitude. Standing close by the lamp-post he began to read.

"You were trap the night before last. I take my Bible oath I tell you the truth."

Westoby neither started nor swore. He

stared at the paper a little, then read the words through carefully again. After that, with his usual motion putting his hand to his beard, he stood for a few seconds with bent head thinking, then he raised it, shook himself a little and walked on, but slowly, thinking still.

The night before last: he had been at Dreyer's canteen, for the first time since their quarrel. He had appointed a meeting there for a native of whom Dreyer had told him, as of one with whom he had had dealings in old days at Jagersfontein. He recalled the details, the commonplace details of a commonplace transaction: the well-known shabby room, with its cretonne-covered walls and thick cretonne window-curtains, its low canvas ceiling, the paraffin lamp on the square table, the lead-foil, the stones; the semi-civilized native in nondescript working-clothes, half-bargain

driving, half-obsequious; Christian Dreyer himself.

And all the while, somewhere behind those invisibly pierced walls, or crouched outside in the yard, beneath that curtained window—traitorously opened for sound maybe, traitorously arranged to admit of sight—the detectives had seen and noted all. He had been trapped; trapped as simply and easily as the merest novice.

He remembered now that Dreyer had been rather drunk that night, had been at least short of sober, stupid and confused; inclined to vague and blear-eyed staring and thick reluctant utterance. The thing was neither so usual as to be unnoticeable, nor so rare as to excite any particular surprise. To Westoby, knowing that his associate would be suffering agonies of nervousness at this resumption of business on his premises, it

had seemed natural enough. Dreyer had been trying to keep up his spirits, and had rather overdone it—nothing more. Fear of the law, fear of Westoby himself, that had seemed to account for all. He alone knew to what heights that fear of himself might have grown; he had been rather pleased, soothed by the thought during the anxious worried day that had succeeded that grey dawn of his return from the Free State; to-night he freely owned his folly in having driven the canteen-keeper to the point where fear becomes desperation.

For there was nothing in Dreyer's fear of the imaginative superstitious awe which paralyzed Jesse Runciman. Dreyer's fear was of a strictly practical description, and when it became unbearable, when it seemed actually to trench upon fulfilment, he would know practical means of helping himself, such as would never have occurred to Jesse.

And Westoby had threatened his life, had even given him a physical foretaste of what a violent death might be.

Yet he had never thought of treason; he who yet would have been the first to admit that all that he hath will such a man as Dreyer give for his life; how much more such a mere moral luxury as his sense of honour? No; he had never thought of it. His heart had not gone with his associate on the night following that stormy day-break; it had shown him nothing of a figure slinking through the darkness to a house in Lanyon Terrace—a house where visitors of this description though they might not be refused were better known than respected; slinking in, frankly hang-dog; slinking out again some half-hour later little less hang-dog than he had gone in. His heart had told him nothing of all this at the time; to-night it seemed that anyone

short of an idiot would have expected it all along.

Once, as he went, he made an instinctive gesture as though to tear the warning paper into undecipherable fragments, but seemed to change his mind. Twenty minutes later he had reached his room. It was still early, little more than nine o'clock. He locked the door, then lighted a lamp and again looked at the note. It was written with watery ink and a spluttering pen on a dirty scrap of common letter paper; the writing showed an illiterate attempt at disguising an illiterate hand. Westoby went to a safe in a corner of the room, and from a tin box inside it took out a bundle of papers. He brought them over to the table, and sorting them rapidly came at last to one which he threw down beside the note. It was an I O U of recent date, and bore the signature of Christian Dreyer. For a moment Westoby

compared the two, then he pushed both papers away with a sort of laugh.

"I thought as much," he said.

He scarcely blamed Dreyer, he had acted after his nature; he could even believe that he had acted with reluctance, between the lines it was not hard to read remorse. But, indeed, his temper now felt strangely calm; it seemed as though the very magnitude of this blow following so close upon the other, had restored his mental equilibrium.

The first thing he did now was to hold the note over the chimney of the lamp; in an instant it was tinder and grey ash. Then he tied up the papers as before and put them back. There was no need for sorting and burning now that the crisis had come; Westoby had never encouraged the style of correspondence which would require such measures. He took out, instead, a well-worn pocket-book, fluttered over for a moment the

bank-notes that it contained, and thrust it into the pocket of a coat which was hanging over a chair.

He knew that at any moment now, literally at any moment, he might find himself arrested; that there might not be five minutes more of freedom left him. Yet he showed nothing of any desperate haste. Quickly, but without hurry, he proceeded to change his saturated, mud-stained clothes. Once more dressed, this time for riding, he filled a travelling flask with whiskey from a bottle in a sort of cupboard against the wall, strapped up a mackintosh into a compact bundle, then put on another of his soft hats, took down his riding-whip from a nail, gave a last look round the room and went out. The lamp he left alight.

He crossed the yard to the stable, saddled his horse, led him out into the street, mounted, and rode off at a brisk trot.

He might take it for granted that he was being watched; but he could now at least count on so much starting time as would be necessary for the alarm to be given at head-quarters. The nearest point at which he could cross the border of the Free State would have been towards Boshof, but to reach that direct he must have increased his risks by re-traversing the whole width of Kimberley. He determined rather to make something of a false start, and then strike for the border at some point higher up and less likely to be guarded than the more usual issues. Every yard of the veld for miles round was little less familiar to him than were the streets of the town; to steer across it for any given point presented no difficulty at all. Now he rode on along the North Circular Road, between the rampart-like mounds of what is now the Central Company's mine; the pant of steam and

occasional clank of machinery mingled with the beating of his horse's hoofs. In another minute he had turned sharp to the right and rode briskly for some three miles up the long flat stretch of the Barkly Road.

The rain had ceased; the clouds were passing over towards the west, and between them the moon shone fitfully. Westoby settled himself in his saddle; now that the worst had come he was conscious of something which was almost of the nature of relief.

Perhaps the rapid motion, the sense of danger gave to his mood even a touch of exhilaration. All intermediaries, as it were, set aside—Runciman, Dreyer, Sarah Arkwright—he stood to fight this thing out with Providence. He had been badly beaten so far. Yet, if he could now escape, if by skill or daring, or strength of man and beast, he could wrest his threatened liberty from

the Power that menaced it, he might conquer still. A new life must begin for him perhaps; yet not as it were one to build up from its foundations. Or, even so, he was conscious in every limb, with every faculty, of being still in the very hey-day of his physical and mental powers. With years of experience behind him, years of vigorous middle age before him, in a country opening up in all directions, what might he not yet do and be?

The scrubby levels of the veld spread dark around him; between them, a straight glistening line where the broken moonlight shone on the mud and chains of pools, the road seemed to flow from beneath the flying hoofs; a moist cool air, too faint to be called a breeze, played about his face and in his horse's mane. For the mere pleasure of the thing, he could have ridden on thus through the empty night for hours; but,

already he had discerned in the wavering watery greyness, the landmark which showed the point at which he meant to leave the road.

For some quarter of a minute he reined up, bending ears keen as those of a savage, lest at any furthest distance, along the way he had come, he might even already hear the tramplings of pursuit. The breathless expectant silence of the night lay upon everything; the sound—what is it?—for which it always seems to wait, did not come; Westoby turned his horse's head towards the right, and began his ride across the veld.

Now was the time for every sense to be on the alert, for every faculty to be turned to watchfulness. Riding on, guiding his trackless course now by some rift-revealed star, now by some mark recognizable by himself alone, he searched continually the

spaces of veld before and around him, as far as the grey moon-twilight allowed his well-practised eye to reach. But he saw nothing. Bushes, indeed, moving cloud-shadows, life-like and suspicious enough to ordinary eyes; they cost him not an instant's tension of nerve or quickening of pulse; he was not to be deceived by these. Once, far away on his left, he saw the red spark-like glow of some outspan fire, and of human life no other sign at all.

He was not now urging his horse to its utmost; for some time past he had been rather restraining it, riding at nothing more than a quick trot. He might have been riding thus for several miles, perhaps he had traversed half the space that lay between him and safety, when, dim among the vagueness to the right, he saw something moving. Something which was neither stray ox nor

mule, which even as he looked, flashed out a gleam as the moon struck on stirrup-steel and white riding-breeches. At the same moment a shout reached him—far away still both sight and sound. Westoby put spurs to his horse.

Heavy weight though he rode, his horse was well up to it, and he had a good start of the two troopers. In front, near enough now to be descried in the misty dissolving light, rose the Boshof hills, low grey shadowy undulations, and towards those the chase swept. The boundary line lay on the hither side.

On through the night, with a dull thunder of hoofs upon the soft loose soil, now among a clump of shadowy mimosa bushes, now, themselves most like more substantial shadows, across the open spaces, they fled like phantoms with no sound but that one low swift monotonous

thud; on towards that invisible line which meant so much, on which, with supremest tension of nerve, the thoughts, the eyes of all were fixed. The pursued gave no look back, the pursuers looked not on one another. The rage of the racer was upon them; the prize for them such professional honour as might scarcely be won again in many years; the prize, for him, all that makes life worth having, the forfeiture—— He had no expectation of being let off with anything short of the maximum sentence: fifteen years of grim servitude, of death in life.

On through the night, and still no perceptible gain or loss, and now the border was but a couple of miles away. Five minutes; the distance was reduced by nearly one-half, and then Westoby's horse stumbled. It was but a loss to be counted by seconds, but before he could make it good the

troopers were perceptibly nearer. Not near enough, though; surely not near enough to snatch liberty from his very grasp! He could actually see it now—the bush with the big stone under it, which lay upon the other side; could see it though a mist born of brain-troubling excitement was before his eyes, could recognize it even though for the moment thought had ceased to be, nothing left but mere sensation. Only half a mile; and then, broken and panting with swiftness, yet borne plainly enough on the wind that whistled past his ear, a cry rang out again upon the night.

"Stop, or I fire."

Westoby looked round and laughed. The cry came for the second time. He looked back no more. It came for the third time. A quarter of a mile now; three hundred yards—— A red flash through the

moonlight, a report, and Westoby's horse rolled over on the veld. When, a moment later, the troopers reached the spot, they found the rider lying beneath him. They dismounted and bent over the prostrate forms. The moon shone out in splendour from between two drifting clouds. Westoby lay with closed eyes, and white face upturned to the sky; his left leg, curiously contorted, was half-hidden beneath the horse. They stood up and looked at each other; then the elder man said:

"I'll put that poor brute out of pain first, anyhow."

And with the word it was done. Then they set to work to extricate Westoby; he groaned once or twice, but did not fairly recover consciousness. The trooper knelt down by his side and gave a closer look at the injured limb.

"Compound fracture, I fancy," he said in a semi-professional tone. "Hand over the water, Davidson; we must bring him to, though it's not so easy to say how we're to get him back."

The first part of the business was easily accomplished. In about a minute Westoby opened his eyes, staring a little amazedly for a moment; then, with a heavy frown, closed them again, and turned his head aside as best he could, muttering an oath.

The troopers were consulting what to do. There chanced to be no farm for miles, no means of transport. There seemed nothing for it but for Davidson to ride back to Kimberley and fetch help. His hand was already on his saddle when Westoby's voice, hoarse and faint with pain, but quite steady, took both men by surprise.

"——you!" he said, with a sort of contemptuous impatience. "You're English-

men, I reckon, if you *are* police. Do you suppose I can't ride?"

It had certainly not occurred to them that he could. Yet if he were willing to try, it might be the better plan, better, at least, than to lie for hours, heated with riding, on the dripping veld, with the cold night wind now rising in rapid gusts, chilling him to the bone. The elder trooper hesitated a sort of surprised assent, half doubt, half relief. Westoby honoured the hesitation with a scornful oath.

"You'll find some whiskey in the pocket of my saddle," he said. "Let me have a pull at that, and then you must give me a hoist up on whichever animal is best up to my weight."

Not without a sort of admiration, they brought him the flask. He took a moderate draught, and handed it back to the nearest trooper.

"Now, then!" he said; and set his teeth.

It was no child's play to get him on to the horse, not even though he really helped himself so far as was possible. By the time it was done his face was grey and distorted with suffering, the drops streamed from his brow; but except to give a brief word of direction he had not uttered a sound. Once settled in the saddle, he made a sign for the whiskey, took another draught, and the return began.

It was then close upon midnight. At three o'clock in the morning they rode into the compound of Kimberley Gaol. But of the details of that ride Westoby could never remember anything at all. Yet he did not again really lose consciousness. It was not till the horses stood still in the prison-yard that the stupendous strain of will by which he had retained it relaxed. With it,

the grasp which he had kept upon the saddle-front relaxed too; his great hands fell inert; he reeled a little forward upon the horse's neck, and fainted.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Samuel and Sarah Arkwright sat together on a slope of the veld. It was the afternoon of Sam's first day of liberty. The shadows of the mimosa bushes were growing long across the rolling plain; the great expanse of blue overhead was touched with the first premonitions of evening, a chastening rather than a change of hue; the low hills and kopjes on the horizon gleamed in strange desert-tints of pink and lilac.

And the land was as the Garden of Eden before them. Bare, and barren, and formless as it was, beautiful perhaps to none,

attractive only to a very few, to these two today it was nothing less than that. And if some of the road behind them had lain through a rather desolate wilderness (and of Sarah at least this was true) she recked little of that now. One verse rang in her mind, it had sung to her all the day—"For he shall not much remember all the days of his life, because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." Not much remember! somewhat, maybe, for thankfulness, for pain not at all.

Her hand was lying on her husband's knee, and now and then he put out his own, and gave it a half rough little squeeze, and their eyes would meet for a moment. Then he would turn again to tease, as affection teases, the ugly, red dust-stained, nondescript white dog, that had nearly gone mad with joy to see him back that morning. Sam had words for him, a flow and rattle

of chaff of all kinds, as the animal had had transports for his master. For each other, husband and wife had scarcely yet found words, other than the most superficial and beside the mark ; nor transport, beyond that of the first long kiss—the kiss of their truer bridal—of which Sarah never knew that the initiative had been hers, so loyally swift had been the response—a response which, after all, had passed into spontaneity before their lips had parted.

Presently Sam ceased playing with the dog ; after a few unavailing efforts to induce him to renew the game, it nestled panting to his side, and he sat fondling it roughly from time to time. His look wandered over the veld, and at last seemed to fix on where, below them, the ash-grey roofs and red-brown walls of Beaconsfield and the Pan huddled confusedly in the hollow. Sarah's eyes followed his ; among the confusion of

roofs she could distinguish the line of the street in which the Runcimans had lived. She knew his thought before he spoke. Yet though it was one near to the heart of both, it was not the deepest thought of either.

"Poor chap!" he said; then after a pause: "It must have been pretty bad for him."

"Yes," said Sarah, and she sighed a little even to-day; "he has been through deep waters."

"How is he taking it all, I wonder?"

Sarah shook her head.

"I know nothing, now," she said. "I have not seen him to speak to since he gave himself up. I was there the day of the trial before the Special Court, but that was a week ago, and we have heard nothing since."

He looked a certain surprise.

"You were in court?"

"Yes; Mattie wished it. She could not bear to go herself, yet she wanted to know —one can understand. She begged me to go; I could not refuse. If he chanced to see me, I knew he would not mind; he would know how it was. I don't know—it might even have been a comfort to him; did I tell you he asked me to go with him to the police-station that afternoon? Oh! Sam," she said, with a touch of agitation breaking through her gentle pitifulness, "I can't think clearly yet; it all seems so strange, so different to everything I had always thought! How could I ever have believed, even a few weeks ago, that *I* should be standing by *him* like that?' Her voice sank again to the uttermost simplicity of compassion. "He had hold of my hand, Sam, all the time he was telling; and when they were obliged to ask him questions he kept looking at me."

Sam looked at her now: he felt rather strangely; his emotions were confused, inexplicable even to himself. Yet there was nothing in them ignoble. He was proud, in his honest heart, if he was not altogether delighted.

"Poor chap!" he said, again, finding indeed, nothing so generally safe and comprehensive to say.

"So I thought he would not mind. But, indeed, I think he didn't notice me at all; I feel sure he didn't. He never looked round for a minute, from the time he was brought in; only straight before him or on the ground—mostly on the ground. I couldn't see his face well, I was too far off, and—and—yes, I was crying too." Her voice was not quite steady for the moment, now. "But I suppose he must have been looking very ill, because they would have allowed him to sit down; but he wouldn't.

And it was after that he lifted up his head for a minute—there, in the dock. I think he felt just then as if he didn't want to be let off anything; not even a little of the staring. Oh! Sam, that dreadful staring!"

She seemed to bear the memory of it with less courage than she had borne the ordeal itself, on the day they two had stood up to face it together.

"Never mind, old lady," he said, soothingly; "it's all over now."

"Yes," she said; "all over!" There was a moment's rising, as of passion, in her voice. It came to nothing, yet. "But about him. He only looked up that one minute; then not any more at all. I'm sure he had made up his mind to go through with everything, but about half-way through he fainted. It was only for two or three minutes; they brought him round without taking him out of court. But after that

he was dazed, I think; he seemed not to rightly understand what was going on. The judge spoke very nicely at the last, Sam; but I think he scarcely heard. Only when the sentence was given, he looked up again and stared a bit, but he didn't speak or seem much upset; only that he stumbled a little as he was going out, as if he was but half awake. They had to help him."

There was a pause; then Sam said, with a sort of compassionate interrogation:

"Five years hard, you said?"

"Yes. Oh! it's dreadful, dreadful; and yet, Sam, I do believe it won't be so bad as what he has been through this last three months. I don't think anything could be."

"Maybe not," said Sam, rather doubtfully. He had not seen, and could scarcely realize, that tyranny. "But—— It ain't nice." Taken in conjunction with the tone,

the very inadequacy of the words was eloquent.

Sarah drew a little nearer; her hand sought his with the old movement—and a difference. When last they had thus sat side by side, it was the wife's hand that had fondled the husband's. To-day hers stole into his, and lay at rest there in the clasp that closed upon it. And again a silence fell, a silence in which Jesse Runciman had ever less and less share in the thoughts of either.

For some minutes they sat so. Then, not suddenly, but as with a quietly formed resolution, Sarah drew a little back from her husband; her hands, withdrawn from his, were clasped upon her knees; her eyes, steady and serene, were fixed upon his face.

"Listen, Sam," she said; "because I owe it you to say this, and maybe I shan't

find words again. I scarcely find them now; it is all new to me. I have not passed this way heretofore."

She spoke with a steady simplicity, which had its pathos, though she felt none. There was no tremor in the voice with which the twelve months' wife confessed, while she surrendered, the long virginity of her heart.

"I knew very little, Sam," she went on, and her voice took a sort of pleading; "I did not know what men meant by love."

"I'd have been glad enough to teach you, missus," he said; there was something of reproach through all the would-be lightness of his tone. "I loved you all the while."

"Yes; I know now. But even if I had known it before, maybe I could scarcely have done better. I think one can't re-

proach oneself into loving. I don't know how it comes. I think God giveth it to His beloved in sleep—like He gave Eve to Adam at the first. Or, as if," she went on, musingly, tracking the thought of her unaccustomed heart, "as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. That is how it has been with me, Sam."

"So long as you've got it!" he said. But the tone was not the tone of doubt.

"Yes," she said. "On that night—the night it all came out—that was when I found it was there. Then, in all that dreadful scattering and confusion—— I can't rightly tell you about *that* part; do you remember the word that says: 'It shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth'? That was how it was with me, so far as poor Mr. Runciman's part in it went."

"It must have been a big upset." He spoke sympathetically, yet he could, after all, enter but little into that matter, and she did not expect it of him.

"Yes," she said again, very simply, and paused. "But then I knew. Because when I should have thought my heart must have been breaking—I found it was glad."

In the dumbness he could not conquer, he made a little sound like laughter, between amazement and content.

"I lay awake all that night, Sam, and I wondered and wondered till at the last I came to understand; and all of my heart that was not going out in prayer for him, went up in thanksgiving. Because I knew, then, all that the Lord had meant to give me, when He gave me to you."

Her breath came a little deeper, a little

quicker ; she put out her hands, and he took them in his and held them.

"I had doubted you, Sam, I had gone near condemning you. But that night I didn't think to feel sorry, I didn't think to feel ashamed ; so far as the east is from the west all that seemed to be put from me. I didn't seem to need to think of wanting forgiveness. I suppose I ought to have, but I didn't."

"I'm glad," he said. "Never do. That's all done with."

"I know," she said. "All over, all over!"

It seemed the one refrain of her soul that day. She looked at him, and her pale eyes shone, and her pale face had a strange new youth in it. Then she drew her hands away again from his.

"I want you to do something for me," she said.

"Anything, missus, and be glad."

She laid her right hand upon the ringed third finger of her left.

"I'm not one to undervalue ordinances," she said. "But it comes upon me that when you put this on my finger, we were but under the law, as it were. I was yours; if all this had never been, if it had pleased the Lord that we should walk apart in spirit all the days of our life, I should have done my duty by you, God helping me, unto the end. But since it has pleased Him to give me so much more—of His royal bounty—I would not be yours as the bondwoman but as the free."

She held out her left hand to him.

"Will you make as if you were putting it on again?" she said.

He was greatly moved; moved for the moment beyond awkwardness. But emotion did not give him words. He did not take

the ring off; the ceremonial would have been too elaborate for the temperament of either. But he drew it up a little along the somewhat labour-worn finger, and pushed it gently back again to its place. Then he took her in his arms.

"God bless you, wife," he said, and kissed her on the lips. When she drew away her face it was wet with happy tears.

"Oh! *this*," she cried, softly, "*this* is the day that the Lord hath made for us two. We will rejoice and be glad in it!"

For a little while she sat with her hand in his; her head rested on his shoulder and his arm was round her waist. Then a distant clock struck five. She raised her head.

"We must go," she said. "Mattie will be wanting her tea."

Her tone showed no kind of abrupt

transition from the half spiritual, half lover-like ecstasy of her last words. Nothing in this woman touched her husband more at once to veneration and to tenderness than the impossibility of seeing where, in her, the spiritual ended and the natural began. Each flowed into each.

Now he rose at her bidding. The slangy remonstrances which would have seemed so natural under the circumstances did not at this moment even rise in his mind. He was solemnized just now, as he had not been on his wedding-day. But, indeed, if the discovery of that night had caused the woman to renew, or rather first to find, her youth, the experiences of the past two months had brought the man at last to manhood. It was legible in his very face. He had not, certainly, left his youth behind him in the prison, but he had left his childishness.

They walked home together with their faces set towards the westering sun; they spoke little, and that of common things. They would speak together no more as they had done but now. But there was that in their look which spoke even to the casual passer-by—which spoke, almost like an insult, to Mattie Runciman, standing half-concealed behind the curtain at the parlour window, as, unseen herself, she watched them drawing near.

She crept back to her Madeira chair, flinging the novel in her hand to the ground, and hid her face among the cushions and began to cry with some dull sense of added injury.

To match the love-tale in those faces what had she? The memory of a white desperate face, raised suddenly from the hands which had shrouded his shame to confront the fretful anger and reproach of

hers. Of a voice, dried of tears, that spoke as out of the abyss:

"Yes, before I sinned for you I loved you. And now I can scarcely remember how it felt."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Oh! Sarah, I can't go. Well, yes, I'll forgive him, then, if you say I must; if he's really dying. But I can't go. I should be no comfort to him; I tell you he hates me now. I won't go and have any more such things said to me as he said that day; you don't know what horrid things they were, right down wicked, I'd not like to repeat them." Mattie's sobs of mingled fear and indignation broke out anew. "And he's a minister! though it's little enough he seems to have thought of that, to be sure. No; you go, tell him I forgive him. There's no use for us to meet."

"Mattie, darling, you *must* go."

"You're very unkind!"

"I should be very unkind to let you keep to a word you'd be sorry for all your life, dearie," said Sarah, patiently.

"You don't know all I've put up with; no, nor half. But this was too much. To be the wife of a thief, of a convict on the Breakwater! And then for him to have the face to say he did it for me!"

"Darling, surely that should not make you harder to him."

"Yes, everybody takes his part! If *I* had gone in for I. D. B., I suppose I'd have been interesting. As I'm only an I. D. B.'s wife——"

Mattie threw up her head with an injured sob. Sarah really did not know what to do with her. And time was going on, and Jesse Runciman's life was ebbing out with the day; they had been told he could

not live to see another. For some few weeks he had been working out his sentence; long enough, perhaps, to let him taste the full quality at least, of its bitterness. The work, indeed, to which he had been set, had been of the lightest kind. It had been imposed at all out of real consideration for his health, otherwise, that part of his punishment would scarcely have come into effect before his removal to Cape Town. But his mental sufferings during the unemployed days before his trial had been so severe, that it seemed cruel, and even dangerous, to condemn him to a longer period of unoccupied brooding. To a certain extent, his health did improve. Perhaps the crisis which, after all, had put an end to the awful nervous strain of the previous months, had come just in time to avert brain fever. But those months had broken down his constitution; it was unable

to resist the slightest attack ; there was no rallying power left. A chill, how contracted, it was impossible to say ; three days' illness ; and now hope was over. And Mattie sat and cried, and could not be induced to move.

For a moment Sarah felt in despair. She clasped her hands, and her lips were moving unknown to herself, in the intensity of her perplexity. Mattie looked at her for a few moments askance.

"Don't pray for me, Sarah," she broke out, snappishly ; "I won't be prayed for!" Then, before any answer was possible : "It won't be any use. I know I'm wicked, and I mean to be wicked—so, there! *They* made me so, the people at Marston. Why couldn't they leave me alone? I'd have done well enough ; I never set up for a saint, but I wasn't wicked, then—— You know I wasn't, Grannie," she said, with a change of tone infinitely piteous.

"My dearie, my dearie!"

She drew Mattie's head upon her breast, and scarcely could she have traced to their source the sudden tears that mingled with those of her little girl. Sarah was happy now; happy as she had never thought to be. Yet if, at this moment, a wish could have set her back with Mattie, on the grass-plot between the high dark-ivied walls beneath the willow-tree—set them back as they had been on that summer afternoon eighteen months before, with all that had been since blotted out not only from memory but from fact: if a wish could have done this, it were rash to say that she would not have breathed it, even though love must have passed with the rest. "Forget also thine own people and thy father's house:" was it the new-born affection of a few weeks that could make easy the command to such a temperament as hers?

"But I'm wicked, now," poor Mattie went on; yet she spoke without the hardness of a few minutes before. "Isn't it a shocking thing that you should come and tell a girl her husband is dying, and she shouldn't be sorry a bit! Should you ever have thought I could have come to that?"

"Dearie, you aren't being just to yourself. You were taken by surprise; you've not rightly taken it in."

It was the truth, but Mattie did not know it. She shook her head.

"In times when people *might* have talked about me, when I was afraid sometimes about myself, I wasn't half so bad really—no, nothing like—as I am now. I was silly; oh! *how* silly I was!" The sudden colour crimsoned in the little face, all too pale now as a rule. She spoke viciously. "But I wasn't wicked, then; I didn't feel as

if I would rather not be good; not at the very worst."

What could Sarah say? This girl, a child still in most ways compared to her friend, had yet gone through experiences such as never had, nor ever could, come to the elder woman. She could but caress in silence. Finding no more opposition, Mattie began to parley.

"I don't suppose he is really so very bad," she said, deprecatingly. "He always used to get into such a state over a very little, whatever went wrong. It would be just like him to send off in a fright."

"How could *he* have anything to say about sending, now?" said Sarah, sadly. "And they don't pay much heed to fancies *there*."

Mattie looked a little startled, for the first time. In fact, prison life meant nothing practical to her; only a vague disgrace.

"Well, I don't see much use in my going," she protested, rising nevertheless. "I shan't know what to say to him. I suppose we haven't spoken to each other for the last two months, without it was to say something nasty. It's easy enough, now, to see what was the matter with him."

But all the while, she was moving fretfully about the bed-room, getting on her out-door clothes. The dressing-table was covered with toilet luxuries and daintinesses, her drawers and boxes were full of garments and knick-knacks representing a scale of expenditure little suited to the slender stipend of a mission minister. She stood at last ready but for her gloves. The bangles on her pretty arms got in her way as she pulled them on. She shook them back impatiently.

"Nasty things!" she said, petulantly,

and her gaze, hardening again, took in the whole. "Mightn't anybody have had the sense to know that I'd rather never have seen one of them than to have been got into such a scrape as this? How could it be worth while?"

Her frame of mind did not seem to promise much either of comfort or of profit from the meeting. But when, half-an-hour later, she stood by the bedside in a ward of the prison hospital, a change came over her. She knew little of illness, yet she could not doubt that the man lying there under the coarse brown blanket, gazing straight before him with great languid, wistful eyes in which the fire of fever was burning low now unto death; she could not doubt that he was dying. And she was frightened, scarcely knew whether more frightened at finding herself within the walls of a prison or at being in the presence of death. She sat

down by the bed-side, and stole glances round her with scared eyes; and she forgot how wicked she was, poor child, and only felt rather pitiful and unutterably forlorn. She wished Sarah had come in; she felt even a kind of protection in the presence of a warder at the far end of the room, of a convict attendant moving about. Anything was better than to be left alone with *him.*

He had turned his head for a moment, with a languid motion, when she had first come up to the bed, but for a moment only. It was Mattie's voice which, in a sort of tremulous whisper, first broke the spell of silence.

"Are you very sick, Jesse?"

He turned his fading eyes upon her.

"Yes; I am dying."

"Oh! — no," she said, vaguely. To which he made no reply at all.

"Sarah said you wanted to see me," she resumed, after a long pause.

"To say good-bye."

"Oh! dear," said Mattie, "how dreadful everything is!" And she began to cry.

"I am sorry to have brought all this trouble and disgrace upon you," he said, after a moment, in the same faint impassive voice as before. "But you will soon be free of it, now."

"Don't talk like that, Jesse."

He took no heed of the protest.

"I have done wrong by you in every way," he went on. "There is no provision for you. And *here*—I am so helpless—it is not only the dying." He said this with a sort of restlessness, then seemed to restrain himself. "Perhaps the Society will do something; they ought not to visit this on *you*. Mrs. Arkwright may be able to persuade them; but, of course, I have no claim

upon them any more. You are not even left a minister's widow, you know," he said, with a bitter sadness. "You know all about that?" And then he muttered, too low for her to hear: "'Let his days be few, and let another take his office.'"

"I'll not be asking them to do anything," said Mattie, vindictively, as soon as she found voice to speak at all. "Horrid old creatures!" She had had her share of lecturing too; and if her experience had been less terrible than his, she was bitterly resentful of any rebuke at all. "I'd not be beholden to one of them—not if I was starving. If . . . if it *really* comes to . . . what you say . . . I'll work my passage home somehow. I'll not stay in this miserable country any more. I wish—oh! how I wish—I'd never seen it!" she ended, passionately.

It might be that he wished the same. He only said faintly:

"I daresay that might be the best plan. But, no doubt, they will allow you your passage-money, at least."

Then he closed his eyes, and lay silent for a space, drifting quietly a little nearer down to death. Again, it was Mattie who spoke first.

"Jesse," she said, piteously enough, "if —if . . . we could have our time all over again, I'd try to do better. I would, really."

"I suppose we should both *try*," he murmured. But there was little hope in his voice; perhaps he saw too clearly, now, the hopelessness of their incompatibility. "You will wish me good-bye?" he went on. "I do not ask you to stay to see the end."

She stooped down and kissed him, and he kissed her back; and she started at the touch of his brow and of his lips.

"Shan't I really see you any more?" she sobbed.

"Do you want to?" he asked, with a touch of surprise, which had in it nothing either of pleasure or of hope.

"Aren't you my husband? Why will you always ask such foolish questions, Jesse?" she replied, with evasive plaintiveness.

And, indeed, he knew the question had been a very foolish one.

"No," he said. "God knows how much I shall have to answer for in my dealings with you. But I think not for that—not for having spoilt your life, so far as your enjoying of it goes. You will soon forget."

She muttered something indistinct through her fast-coming sobs.

"Don't cry," he said, quietly. "I am glad that it should be so."

Glad! If the shadow on the dial of his life could have been set back for thrice the Hebrew monarch's fifteen years, there was that in his voice which showed that never,

through days prolonged into old age, would he have known gladness any more. He lay silent for some minutes after that, lay looking at her. Thus lingeringly had he looked, feeding passion greedily, in hours when every curve and dimple, every tint and glow and movement, had been a separate stirring of his heart to desire. Now he had come to the days when, in any case, desire shall fail. But with him it had failed long since. Thus, again, had he lain and looked in far other times. In long nights when the slow moonlight, dragging across the room, had rested for a while upon the lovely half-veiled form, upon the face, fair and flushed with the sleep that would not come to him. Moments when, so he had told her, he had looked at her, thus unconscious, as a lost soul may look upon its seducer in hell.

Those times were past, too; to-day hatred was as dead as was desire. There

was nothing between them now, but a great passionless estrangement; it might almost be wondered whether in another world their souls would know each other, so little had they ever touched on earth.

Mattie cried on; her tears did not seem to agitate him, but, perhaps, he found them physically exhausting, for his voice was perceptibly weaker when he spoke again.

"I am getting very tired; I don't know how much longer I shall be able to think or speak. If Arkwright and Mrs. Arkwright have come, and it is allowed, I should like to see them now."

"They are here," she sobbed, rising. "I will send them. Is—is there anything I can get for you—do for you—before I go?"

She looked round vaguely, with helpless good-will.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then—I'll—go and tell them."

"Thank you," he said; "it will be kind."

She went lingeringly, stopping a moment to speak to the warder on her way. Her husband sent no lingering glances after those lingering steps; only when they had died away, he sighed once faintly: a sigh given to one detail of a vast regret.

The warder came and gave him some kind of stimulant, and a few minutes later the Arkwrights came in. This time he knew what he had to say. He spoke with the almost impassive manner he had used towards Mattie, of which it was hard to say whether it was the result of physical weakness or of conscious repression.

"I hoped you would come," he said. "I wanted to ask your forgiveness before I die."

"Oh! you needn't have sent to ask *that*, old chap," said Sam, with awkward heartiness. "It's all right about *that*, you know."

"You are very kind," he said, as before. "But it was right that I should ask. I wronged you very deeply. I am ashamed. If any words could mean more, I would say them. If it were possible for any more disgrace to come upon me from without, I would be thankful for it, because it makes the shame here," he touched his breast, "a little easier to bear."

"Oh! . . . well . . ." said poor Sam, "you . . . you were in a most awful hole, you know. Like enough in your place, I——"

But native honesty, compelling him actually against his will to justice towards himself, even at the expense of seeming generosity to others, would not suffer him to complete the well-intentioned lie. The power of keen feeling was well nigh over for Jesse Runciman, and yet, perhaps, one of the bitterest drops in the dregs of his cup of

shame came to him in that little broken-off sentence from the lips of the man he had so long dared to despise. He drained it in silence; only his eyes sought Sarah's with a kind of self-scorn which was also an appeal. She laid her hand on his, as she knelt by the bed, and a whole world of compassion, strong with hope, shone out in her eyes.

"'Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Thy name, O Lord,'" she said, very softly; and the words took a strange sound of benediction.

His sad eyes did not brighten, but his look lost something of its bitterness.

"Thank you, brother," he said, so quietly that Sam was comforted for his vague confusion. "It isn't for me to say 'God bless you'—not to anybody any more. But if I dared, I would."

Sam bent down, and took in his the hand which could not raise itself to meet his clasp.

"I'll not say anything more," he said, rather huskily; "I'm a stupid chap at talking always. Only, I'll just take that 'God bless you,' as said, and thank *you* for it. *I'm* not afraid but what it'll be heard."

He did not see Jesse's face, because all his vision was filled with the light of Sarah's sudden smile turned up to him; he did not feel the death-chill in the hand he held, for the glad warmth that crept into his heart with the grateful pressure of the fingers that closed on his upon the other side.

Sarah stood up the same moment; for Sam there could be no more to be said: he hailed the permission to depart, which he read in her eyes, with relief. She went with him a few paces down the ward, spoke to him a moment in a low voice. She was only asking him to take Mattie home, and see to her comfort before returning to work. But to the dying man, the looks, the unconscious

gestures, the whole suggestion of the bearing of husband and wife towards each other brought a sense of loneliness beyond the necessary loneliness of death. He had not wept at parting with Mattie; yet now, for very pity of himself that he had not been able to weep, his last tears gathered in his eyes. He did not see Sarah come back to the bed; did not notice her till she knelt once more by his side.

"You will let me stay?" she said, gently. "Poor Mattie *would*, I know, but she has known little of trouble, she is easily frightened. It was kind of you to let her go."

He did not dispute it; perhaps he did not take it in. When she said that she would stay, he had turned his head, moved one hand feebly, with the gesture of a child towards its mother.

After a while, he fixed his great sad eyes upon her.

"The Lord is just," he said.

She did not quite catch his thought.

"He is compassionate," she said, softly, "and of great mercy."

"Mercy?" he said, almost bitterly. "Ay! Liar, coward, drunkard, hypocrite and thief: I have plenty of claims, on mercy." Then he broke out with a sort of low wailing, which weakness would not allow to rise into a cry: "And a year ago—oh! God, only a year ago! Why could they not leave me alone? I had never done them any harm that they need have wrecked my life."

It was Mattie's cry over again, and again Sarah was dumb before it. Earthly providences must expect to find their apologists occasionally hard put to it for an answer.

"No," he said, with a sort of resolute humility, after a moment; "He will not

suffer any man to be tempted above that he is able. I will not go into His Presence with any lie of an excuse; I have enough to answer for without that. It is myself I have to thank for everything."

It was true courage that kept Sarah from urging the excuses, which she felt might have been made. It was well he should not make them.

"Do you know?" he went on, faintly; "I prayed for all this. 'The Lord do so to me and more also;' that is what I said. and He has." She did not understand the allusion to his midnight vow, nor did he seek to explain it. "'More also;' ay, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. Shame? You don't know all I have gone through. This —degradation, prison, a nameless grave—a convict's grave: because it is public, it may seem worse, but in the time before—— The company I have had to keep, the way they

used to speak to me—*at* me; you heard *him*, but that was only one—there were worse. Shame? To avoid open disgrace, I have drunk its very dregs in secret—drunk them and sucked them out—and after all that—the thing I perilled my soul to escape has come upon me too. Yes; He is just.'

"Else," said Sarah, "there would be no foundation anywhere. Brother, I would rather that His justice were magnified on me and mine to the uttermost, than that any poor soul, losing faith in that, should lose faith in His goodness too. They must go together."

"Then what for me?"

"The broken and contrite heart that He will not despise," she said, gently. "To keep one's promise, one's free promise, that is justice too."

He sighed a little, but made no answer;

he was getting past speech, that last effort had exhausted his strength. After this, for a long quiet hour, he made no sign nor sound at all. Sarah too was silent for the most part; once or twice she repeated a verse or two, once or twice a few words of the prayer which never ceased in her soul, broke almost unconsciously from her lips. She could not tell whether either reached a heart which, she felt, was indeed broken; she had to be content with seeing that, if there was little of active hope in his face neither was there despair.

The broad unmellowed light of mid afternoon streamed into the rough bare ward. Within the building were sounds of steps and voices; from without, through the open window, a trampling of hoofs from the stables; a trooper was whistling as he rubbed down his horse; now and then some group of lounging officials off duty

would break into a laugh. Life was in full tide everywhere, ignoring death.

At about four o'clock, Jesse opened his eyes. He half-raised himself in the bed, and his voice was clear and almost strong.

"The blessing of him that was ready to perish be upon you, sister," he said. "I'm going."

And even as he said it, Jesse Runciman was gone.

It is some years, now, since the rough mound of red earth and rocky white stone rose in its raw newness over the nameless grave he had foretold for himself. Nameless it was, but though long since left, in the now unused cemetery, to such general care as may be bestowed by hireling hands, there are signs still that once it had been owned by affectionate regret. Within the black wood paling the geraniums which Sarah planted

still live, though straggling, woody and overgrown; the tinder-like remains of an everlasting wreath lie, yet, upon the burnt-up soil. But no one comes there now; the hands that tended it do their gentle ministrations in Kimberley no more. After all that had happened the place became actually painful to Sarah, nor did Sam feel anything at all of his first enthusiasm for it. They lingered on there for some six months after Jesse's death, Sam always talking about moving, and at last they went. Now, where Grahamstown nestles among trees, in the green hollow of the grassy rolling hills, Sarah has found a more congenial home. As for Sam, if it is a very quiet one he had been accustomed to quietness all his days; the place where he had undeniably "seen life" had not procured him such experiences as to enamour him of excitement. There are children in the home now, too; in an

unbounded and ever-new delight and pride in his little ones, in the certainty that, even in them, he has no rival in his wife's heart; in all this Sam finds a happiness amply sufficient for his simple kindly soul, which knows little either of ambition or of greed.

It is but seldom he remembers that far-off grave; of all who knew him Sarah alone, perhaps, amidst all her sweet content, keeps for Jesse Runciman a memory, tender with mother-like compassion, ever living in her heart.

Westoby does not think of him. Even in circumstances which most tend to brooding over the past, whether for wrath or for regret, he is able to keep his soul out of that hell. Though, if the thought ever did occur he would face it with equanimity, for he considers that he and his victim were very fairly quits. He is still serving his

time. If any prospect of remission exists, he does not know of it, and he sets his will as resolutely against the sickening of a doubtful hope, as against the embittering of useless memories. He is not a model convict, but he keeps out of trouble : he is reasonable enough to know when, and, it is fair to say, strong enough to know how to obey. There have been times, indeed, when the longing for liberty has become almost beyond endurance. But though escape offers no very insuperable difficulties he has hitherto refrained from attempting it. His is no insignificant form or personality, such as might pass unnoticed anywhere. Nature has made him a marked man ; he recognizes this, and has decided that the satisfaction of two or three days of freedom would not be worth the increase of punishment consequent on recapture. But whether reason will always be strong enough to control the

cravings of his deepest nature can scarcely be foretold. The years go very heavily.

Nor does Christian Dreyer think of the man whom he and Westoby did to death between them. Of Westoby he does think, not unfrequently, and always with genuine regard. There are many, more recognizedly immoral, episodes in his past, which cause him much less distress than does that unfortunate necessary treason. Still he quite feels that it was unavoidable; this certainty modifies remorse into an endurable regret. Him, likewise, Dutoitspan knoweth no more. His appearance as Queen's evidence effectually destroyed his prospects among such a *clientèle* as his had been. He disposed of his business fairly well, and made his way to Johannesburg. There, after many months of very fluctuating fortunes, a lucky speculation landed him in prosperity. He did not risk it afresh; there was nothing in

Dreyer of the spirit of the gambler, to let well alone was never any difficulty to him. Now, as proprietor of two or three flourishing bars, he is rich enough to afford to be respectable—and very likely he is so. So far, at least, the law knows nothing to the contrary.

And Mattie? For her Runciman had foretold a swift forgetfulness. Yet has the prophecy been but half fulfilled. Outwardly that brief episode of her opening womanhood had scarcely affected her life. Except that she had severed her connection with the Primitive Gospellers; she goes to church on Sunday evenings now. Otherwise her career is much what it might have been had she never left home. By dint of native talent and of real painstaking, she has worked her way up from very small beginnings to be forewoman in a large millinery establishment in a prosperous

northern town. Her experiences have left no trace upon her person; no line of care, no loss of bloom or sparkle accuses the trouble of her past. She is still young, still pretty. But from a coquette she has become a little bit of a shrew. She has hardened curiously. Man delighteth her not; and she does not always take much pains to hide the fact. There have been those whom the lively cynicism of six-and-twenty has not discouraged; if she had willed, she might have formed new ties ere this. But she will never re-marry. Her mind, indeed, has practically forgotten; but her instinct remembers, and remembers with aversion. Yet memory has lost all power to pain; so far as it is synonymous with conscious thought, it may be said to have ceased to be. Even in dreams the image of Jesse Runciman has long since ceased to haunt.

He would not have wished it otherwise. It is not this that would trouble any peace which may, in Heaven's mercy, have gathered by now about a once very sorely-driven soul.

THE END

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